

# STATE OF JUSTICE

*STATE SUPREME COURTS AND  
THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY*

# 2025

STATE COURT  
**JUSTICE**  
PROJECT

**AFJ**  
ACTION



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report examines the impact of elections and vacancies in 2024 on state supreme courts nationwide. As federal courts continually erode the protection of human rights, states are increasingly positioned to become havens where these rights are preserved, and state supreme courts are playing an ever more significant role in determining which rights are afforded to the residents of their states. Accordingly, state courts are uniquely positioned to safeguard our most fundamental civil rights and liberties, including healthcare and reproductive rights, access to education and equity, LGBTQ+ rights, labor rights, environmental protections, voting rights, and much more. It remains essential that state court benches are composed of judges who are committed to protecting and upholding our most fundamental rights. Following a year in which more than half of the states held elections or filled vacancies for their high court judges, we must assess the developments that occurred and the current state of these courts.

This report explores the landscape of our nation's state supreme courts, including developments from the 2024 election cycle, key appointments by governors and legislatures, updates on ethics issues, and important decisions by state supreme courts from the past year that highlight exactly how these courts are empowered to make profound impacts on every aspect of democracy for their states' residents. This report also analyzes the current makeup of state supreme courts in all fifty states following the 2024 election cycle, in which thirty-two states held elections for eighty-one seats, and fourteen new justices were appointed to ten courts. Finally, the report looks ahead to expected elections and vacancies on state supreme courts around the country this year and next, anticipating how these impending changes will further shape our nation's highest state courts.

Partisan control of several benches was on the line in 2024. In Michigan, progressives expanded their control of the state's highest court by reelecting an incumbent and flipping an open seat previously held by a conservative justice. Progressives lost a seat on the Montana Supreme Court but maintained their majority. And Republicans expanded their decades-long control over the Ohio Supreme Court, winning one open seat and defeating two incumbent Democratic justices. The results in these and several other states, including Mississippi and North Carolina, suggest that partisan elections confer slight advantages for Republican candidates and that voters in nonpartisan judicial elections appear to favor candidates who are women slightly.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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State supreme court elections resulted in historic victories in two states in 2024. Voters in Kentucky's 5th supreme court district elected the first Black woman to join the Kentucky Supreme Court. And in Louisiana, the state with the second highest Black population, voters in the state's second judicial district elected only the fourth Black justice to join the state's highest court. The election resulted from the redistricting of the state's judicial districts, which the court itself requested. The redistricting created a second majority-Black district and will result in the first time that two Black justices have sat on the court simultaneously. The historic outcomes of these two elections suggest that state supreme court judicial districts might help advance judicial diversity in limited circumstances.

In past years, state supreme court races have attracted little attention, with few stakeholders invested in their outcomes. However, as the ability of state supreme courts to affirm or derail the agendas of governors and legislatures has become increasingly apparent in recent years, these races have garnered far more attention. In 2024, margins in several states, including Oklahoma, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Washington, came down to thousands or even hundreds of votes. The unusually tight margins of these once-ignored state supreme court races coincided with both in-state and outside spending that was higher than in previous years. These results follow a nationwide trend that has made these races much more competitive — and much more expensive — as the importance of these races is increasingly recognized.

As the importance of state courts becomes increasingly apparent, Alliance for Justice Action Campaign (AFJ Action) remains committed to educating the public about the crucial importance of state courts and advocating for the election and appointment of highly qualified, demographically and professionally diverse state court judges who uphold equal justice for all. We recognize that the work of understanding, protecting, and transforming our state courts is more crucial to our democracy and way of life than ever before.



# INTRODUCTION

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As the foundation of our nation's judicial system, state courts hear over 95% of court cases in the United States — over one hundred million cases annually. These courts can function as the final line of defense against the continued erosion of fundamental rights at the national level by interpreting state constitutions to afford protections that can extend well beyond those found in the U.S. Constitution.

In the majority of states, voters are empowered to choose who sits on the benches of those states' highest courts through direct elections or retention elections following appointments. Voters can also weigh in on gubernatorial and legislative appointments to state high courts, whether through public response or at the ballot box.

In 2024, over half of the states held elections for seats on their high courts, and governors or legislatures made over a dozen new appointments. As people pay increasing attention to the power that state supreme courts can wield, interest groups and outside actors have taken unprecedented action. Although governors and legislatures have traditionally held the power to shape state supreme court benches through the appointment process, 2024 also saw the political branches in several states working to influence state court judicial elections in problematic ways. For example, the Oklahoma governor urged voters to remove three justices from his state's highest court, and the Arizona legislature asked voters to consider a resolution that would have given all of their state's judges life terms.

Last year, amidst the constantly changing makeup of state supreme courts, these courts continued to make decisions that have profound impacts on fundamental rights. It is more important than ever that state courts reflect the populations and lived experiences of the people whose lives can be deeply affected by their decisions.

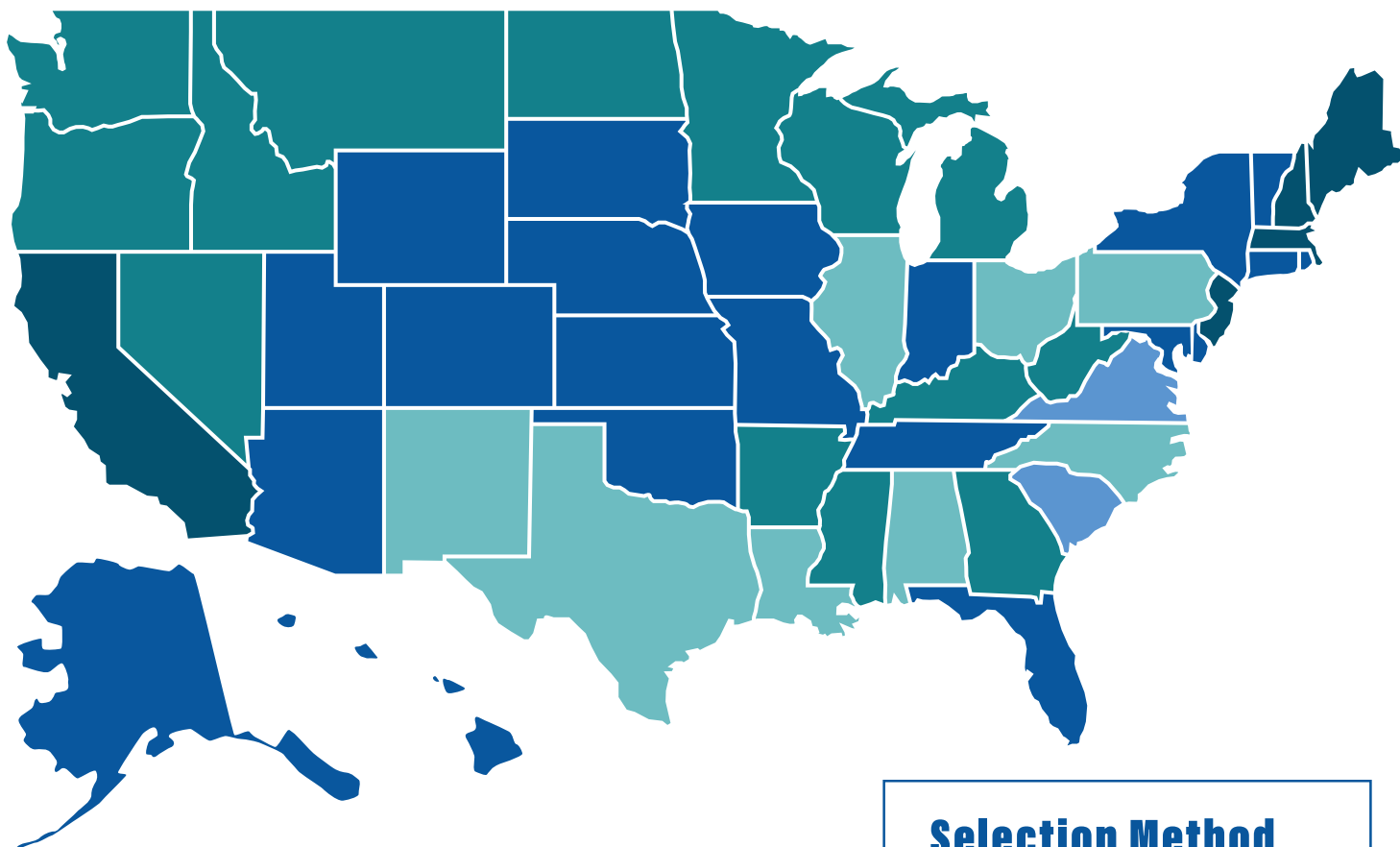
# INTRODUCTION

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AFJ Action's state courts team continues to expand its work to educate voters and stakeholders about the crucial importance of selecting diverse, experienced judges committed to preserving civil liberties to sit on our state supreme courts. AFJ's [State Court Justice Project](#) is an interactive hub that details the selection method, justice information, and the current composition of the highest courts in all 50 states. The hub also highlights states, providing in-depth information on each justice, notable cases from each court, and reports that explore the diversity of our nation's highest courts. Additionally, it offers information on how to weigh in on specific state supreme court vacancies through elections or appointments. The hub is continually growing, with the intention of equipping communities and activists in every state with knowledge of their state courts.

Following dozens of state supreme court elections and several crucial appointments in 2024, state supreme courts are uniquely positioned to bolster our fundamental rights as the direction of the nation is forecast to endanger those rights in unprecedented ways. With our way of life as we know it at stake, our mission of educating voters to understand how they can participate in shaping the composition of their state courts to preserve their fundamental civil and human rights could not be more vital.

# THE STATE COURT LANDSCAPE IN 2024



The selection of supreme court justices varies from state to state. Eight states elect their supreme court judges and justices by partisan election, fourteen states by nonpartisan election, twenty-one states by merit selection, five states by gubernatorial appointment, and two states by legislative election.

## Selection Method

- Partisan Election
- Non-Partisan Election
- Merit Selection
- Gubernatorial Appointment
- Legislative Election

In **partisan elections**, judicial candidates are listed on the ballot with a political affiliation and are chosen through public elections. Under this model, candidate identifications on the ballot may include, for example, Democrat, Republican, Independent, Green, or Libertarian.

In **nonpartisan elections**, judicial candidates are not formally affiliated with a political party on the ballot and are chosen through public elections. In some states, such as Michigan, partisan primaries or nominating conventions are held to select judicial candidates who will represent their parties on the general election ballots.

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**Retention elections** are uncontested elections held when a judge's term is about to expire. The judge is put on the ballot with a "yes" or "no" vote to keep their position. A judge up for retention election must meet a certain threshold of "yes" votes to remain in their seat. These thresholds vary by state but typically range from 50% to 60%. If a judge loses a retention election, a replacement judge will be chosen using the state's interim appointment method.

**Merit selection**, also referred to as the **Missouri Plan** or **assisted appointment**, is a two-stage process. First, a nominating commission screens applications and interviews prospective candidates. Members of these commissions may be elected by bar associations, governors, legislatures, other elected officials, private citizens, or a combination of these methods. Then, the commission recommends a slate of preferred candidates — typically three to five — to the appointing body, which is usually the governor or the state legislature. The appointing body makes a final selection from this slate. Whether the appointing body is required to choose from the commission's list varies by state. After an individual is appointed, they are retained on the bench for subsequent terms by retention elections or by review and renomination by the commission, governor, or legislature.

**Gubernatorial appointment**, also referred to as governor selection or appointment, is a process by which a state's governor nominates individuals to the bench, and it sometimes involves some form of confirmation to the bench by another body. This selection method differs from merit selection because the governor does not have to choose candidates from a recommended or required slate. In some states, like Maine, the governor chooses to partner with a commission to identify and recommend candidates to the confirming body. Once the governor selects their nominee, a legislative or other government body may vote to confirm the nominee.

In **legislative elections**, the state's legislature elects its justices by a vote. A judicial nominating commission may be utilized to initially vet potential judicial candidates and forward a select number of candidates to the legislative bodies for consideration.



# THE STATE COURT LANDSCAPE IN 2024

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Following the 2024 state supreme court elections, partisan majorities expanded in some courts. They decreased in others, and several states witnessed historic firsts with the addition of history-making judges to their courts. Surprisingly tight margins decided races in several states, and a legislatively initiated ballot proposal sought to give state supreme court justices lifetime terms, possibly foreshadowing a new era in which more traditionally partisan levers seek to entrench further their party's power in their state's highest court. With increasing attention being paid to the power these courts can wield, 2024 followed a multi-year trend that has seen considerably higher spending, particularly outside spending, in these elections than in previous years.

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## IMPACTS ON PARTISAN CONTROL

Partisan control was on the line for several state supreme courts in the 2024 election cycle, including in Michigan, Montana, and Ohio. Republicans in Ohio have maintained control of the state's highest court for nearly 40 years and expanded their majority in 2024, while justices supported by Democrats continue to hold the majority in the high courts in Michigan and Montana following the 2024 election.

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## Michigan Supreme Court Election

Although voters select Michigan's seven supreme court justices through nonpartisan elections, candidates for the court are chosen by political party delegates. From 2022 to 2024, four justices were aligned with the Democratic Party, while three justices were affiliated with the Republican Party. In 2024, the court had one open seat, while another seat, then held by an incumbent justice, was up for election. Democrats nominated Associate Justice Kyra Harris Bolden, who previously served in the Michigan House of Representatives and worked as a criminal defense attorney, to complete the remainder of her term, expiring in 2029, after being appointed by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in 2022. For the vacant seat, previously held by a Republican-aligned justice, Democrats nominated Kimberly Thomas, a professor at the University of Michigan Law School and co-founder and director of the law school's Juvenile Justice Clinic. Bolden faced challenges from Republican State Representative Andrew Fink and Fifth Circuit Court Judge Patrick O'Grady, both of whom were nominated by the Republican Party. In the November 2024 general election, Bolden defeated O'Grady with 61.5% of the vote, while Thomas won against Fink with 61.1% of the vote. The victories of both Democratic candidates shifted the court's partisan balance to five justices supported by Democrats and two justices backed by Republicans. Republicans will have another chance to change the court's composition in 2026 when the terms of two justices are set to expire.

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## Ohio Supreme Court Election

Justices of the Ohio Supreme Court, a seven-member court, are selected in partisan elections. The court's seven seats were considered nonpartisan offices until 2020, when legislation was enacted that requires candidates to run with a partisan designation. Before 2020, Ohio used a selection method similar to Michigan's, with candidates nominated by political party delegates to run in nonpartisan elections. A majority of seats on the Ohio Supreme Court have been controlled by Republicans since 1986. As of 2024, four of the court's justices were Republicans, and three were Democrats. The terms of three justices expired in 2024. Two incumbent Democratic justices, Melody Stewart and Michael Donnelly, were first elected to the court in 2018 and ran for second six-year terms on the court. The third incumbent, Joe Deters, was appointed to the court in 2023 by Gov. Mike DeWine (R) to fill a term that expires in 2028. Under Ohio law, which prohibits any candidate over the age of seventy from seeking judicial office, Deters, who will turn 70 in 2027, would have been required to leave the court following the expiration of his partial term. But rather than run to fill the remainder of his term, Deters challenged Stewart as a Republican for a full six-year term on the court. Donnelly was challenged by Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas Judge Megan Shanahan, running as a Republican. For the open partial term, Eighth District Court of Appeals Judge Lisa Forbes ran as a Democrat, and Franklin County Court of Common Pleas Judge Dan Hawkins ran as a Republican. In the November 2024 general election, Deters defeated Stewart with 55.2% of the vote, Shanahan defeated Donnelly with 55.7% of the vote, and Hawkins defeated Forbes with 55.1% of the vote. The Republican sweep shifted the partisan balance of the Ohio Supreme Court from four Republicans and three Democrats to six Republicans and just one Democrat. While Hawkins's partial term will expire in 2028, Deters, alongside Shanahan, can remain on the court until the expiration of his six-year term in 2031. With the seats of one Republican and the court's lone Democrat up for election in 2026, Republicans could complete their sweep of the state's highest court.

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## Montana Supreme Court Election

In Montana, state supreme court justices are elected in non-partisan races. While the races are “officially” non-partisan, issue advocacy groups sometimes become involved in the elections, helping to indicate the potential ideological leanings of the justices. In the case of unexpected vacancies, the appointing governor’s political affiliation may also be an ideological indicator. Chief Justice Mike McGrath and Justice Dirk Sandefur, both progressives, did not seek re-election to the court, and the court was controlled by progressives with a 5D-2R split, meaning this election could have flipped partisan control of the court. Montanans elected Cory Swanson as chief justice and Katherine Bidegaray as associate justice to replace Chief Justice Mike McGrath and Justice Dirk Sandefur, respectively. This shifted the ideological balance of the state’s high court from 5D-2R to 4D-3R. The state’s high court has also been the center of attention during the state legislature’s 2024 session. Legislative Republicans created [a committee](#) to draft judicial reform bills aimed at undercutting the court’s authority. The committee was formed after legislative leaders criticized the court for being “out of control” due to decisions striking down voting laws and challenging gubernatorial authority.

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### HISTORIC FIRSTS

The 2024 election cycle included barrier-breaking victories, with the first Black woman joining Kentucky’s highest court and two Black justices now serving on the Louisiana Supreme Court simultaneously for the first time in the court’s history.

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## Kentucky Supreme Court Election

Kentucky’s seven supreme court justices each represent judicial districts with roughly equal populations within the state, with the residents of each judicial district electing the justices who represent their district. Open seats on the Kentucky Supreme Court are chosen in nonpartisan elections. In 2024, the justice representing the state’s 5th supreme court district announced he would retire from the court upon the expiration of his term, creating an open seat for the election. Two candidates ran for the seat in the nonpartisan general election. Erin Izzo, an attorney who worked in private practice, faced Judge Pamela Goodwine of the Fifth Appellate District Court of Appeals. Judge Goodwine, who was previously a circuit court and district court judge, also served as commissioner and later chair of the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights before joining the bench. In the November 2024 general election, Goodwine defeated Izzo with 77.9% of the vote. Goodwine’s victory made her the first Black woman to join the Kentucky Supreme Court and the second Black justice to ever serve on the state’s highest court.

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## Louisiana Supreme Court Election

Following a federal court order mandating the redistricting of Louisiana's congressional maps in January 2024, five out of the seven state supreme court justices requested that the legislature include the state's judicial districts in the process and create a second majority-Black district. It had been 25 years since the maps were last redrawn. With census numbers showing that the state's population is about one-third Black residents, the justices urged the legislature to include them in the process. There was a previous attempt to add a second majority-Black supreme court district during the 2022 legislative reapportionment process, but the judicial districts were never brought to a vote and remained the same. This time, in March 2024, the state senate proposed and passed new judicial districts, including two majority-Black districts. In May 2024, Governor Jeff Landry signed the maps into law, giving Louisiana residents a fairer judicial map. As a result, the voters elected Judge John Michael Guidry as the next state supreme court justice. Guidry is the fourth Black justice elected to the state's highest court.

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### TIGHT MARGINS

State supreme court races are typically statewide races in which hundreds of thousands or even millions of voters participate. But in 2024, state supreme court races in Oklahoma, Washington, Mississippi, and North Carolina were decided by margins of thousands or even just a few hundred votes.

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## Oklahoma Supreme Court Election

Fewer than 8,000 votes decided each retention election for the Oklahoma Supreme Court. Though comfortable margins have traditionally retained justices, and no justice has ever been removed from the court, the three justices of the state's highest court for civil matters faced significant opposition, including from groups affiliated with Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt (R) and the Judicial Crisis Network, which were determined to remove the justices from the court. These groups spent nearly \$2 million on television and social media ads that accused the justices, all of whom were appointed to the court by Democratic governors, of "legislating from the bench" on issues that are important to conservative and business interest groups. Stitt publicly announced that he intended to vote 'no' on retaining the three justices. Ultimately, 51% of voters chose to retain Justice James Edmondson, with a margin of 29,251 votes separating the 'yes' and 'no' votes. Similarly, 50.3% of voters retained Justice Noma Gurich, with a spread of 7,553 votes. However, Justice Yvonne Kauger was removed from the court by 50.2% of voters, a margin of just 7,048 votes. Kauger became the first justice to be removed from the state's highest court for civil matters, and Stitt will appoint her replacement. Unburdened by the onslaught of negative campaigning by the governor and outside groups, the three incumbents of the state's highest court for criminal matters, the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals, were retained by between 59% and 64% of voters.

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## Washington Supreme Court Election

In one of the closest contests in Washington's recent state supreme court elections, Sal Mungia defeated Dave Larson by 39,944 votes out of 3,285,216, a margin of less than 1% of the total vote. Justice Mungia filled the open seat created by the retirement of Justice Susan Owens. It was the [first](#) contested race for an open supreme court seat since 2012. Democratic groups, as well as all the sitting state supreme court justices, supported Mungia, while Republican groups backed Larsen. Mungia had been a civil trial attorney focusing on complex litigation. Larsen worked in private practice, litigating on behalf of insurance companies, before being appointed as judge to the Federal Way Municipal Court. Larsen [criticized](#) the court, claiming that justices were letting their biases influence recent decisions. He pointed to a 2021 decision that found a state drug possession law unconstitutional.

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## Mississippi Supreme Court Election

The nine justices of the Mississippi Supreme Court are chosen in nonpartisan elections. Justices are elected to the court from three judicial districts, with three justices representing each district. Of the four Mississippi Supreme Court seats on the ballot in 2024, two incumbents were re-elected without opposition, and a third incumbent was defeated handily by a challenger. But Associate Justice Jim Kitchens received four challengers for his Central District, Place 3 seat. The state does not hold primaries in judicial races, and if no candidate receives a majority of the general election votes, the top two vote-getters advance to a runoff election held three weeks after the general election. No candidate received a majority of votes in the November 2024 general election, with Kitchens receiving 35.5% of votes and Republican State Senator Jenifer Branning receiving 41.7% of votes. Kitchens, considered a centrist, raised over \$500,000 for his campaign, which received strong support from personal injury attorneys and organizations. Branning was supported by numerous Republican elected officials, business owners, and business-friendly organizations, and raised nearly \$900,000. Branning and groups supporting her spent heavily on ads that warned liberals could dominate the court if she were not elected, despite Kitchens's status as a centrist and at least seven of the court's nine justices identifying as ideological conservatives. Kitchens and Branning went into a runoff election on November 26. Following weeks of counting, during which the lead changed several times, Branning was declared the winner on December 6, defeating Kitchens by 1,440 votes, a margin of just 0.6%.

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## North Carolina Supreme Court Election

The North Carolina Supreme Court election was one of the closest partisan contests in the state last year. Incumbent Justice Allison Riggs (D) narrowly defeated her Republican challenger, Court of Appeals Judge Jefferson Griffin. Riggs joined the court after Gov. Roy Cooper (D) appointed her to fill the seat vacated by retiring Justice Michael Morgan. To serve on the bench for a full term, Riggs ran for election to the bench in 2024. After the North Carolina State Board of Elections completed two recounts, it declared Riggs the winner of the November 2024 election by just 734 votes. Griffin then challenged the legality of approximately 65,000 ballots in the election, including those of Riggs's own parents. Griffin challenged about 60,000 ballots he claimed had incomplete registration and about 5,000 overseas and military ballots. The North Carolina Board of Elections rejected Griffin's challenges and refused to order a hand recount. Indeed, prior recounts expanded Riggs's lead. Given Griffin's attempts to overturn the election results, the North Carolina Democratic Party filed a suit in federal court to ensure that the results were certified. However, the federal judge sent the case back to the state courts.

In early January, the state supreme court, in a 4–2 vote, ruled to block the certification of the court's election results while the case was heard by lower courts. Justice Richard Dietz, a Republican, dissented from the five-member conservative majority. In February 2025, Wake County Superior Court Judge William Pittman blocked Griffin's attempt to overturn the election results. Griffin then appealed the case to the Court of Appeals, and the state board of elections attempted to appeal the case directly to the state supreme court. Still, the court, in another 5-2 majority, rejected the appeal and remanded the case back to the appellate court — a decision that slightly favored Griffin, as the court of appeals is currently controlled by Republicans.

A majority Republican three-judge panel on the appellate court sided with Griffin, ordering that the challenged ballots must be cured, with correct information, within 15 days or they would be thrown out. Riggs appealed the decision to the state supreme court. The supreme court delivered a partial win to Riggs and the voters by blocking Griffin's attempt to disenfranchise 60,000 voters. However, the court affirmed Griffin's attempt to strip the approximately 5,000 military and overseas voters of their votes. The court gave those voters 30 days to cure their ballots and ordered the board of elections to begin its cure efforts by identifying the affected voters. Riggs challenged the decision in federal court, pointing to the fact that Griffin did not target all military and overseas ballots from across the state but only those from four counties. The federal district court ruled in Griffin's favor and upheld the state supreme court's ruling ordering the cure process. After that ruling, the state board of elections identified only up to 1,675 ballots in Guilford County that would actually be subject to the cure effort. Because Griffin added ballots in the other three counties after the deadline passed, the board of elections did not include them in the cure effort. Several days after the board's identification of the 1,675 still-disputed ballots, a federal appeals court blocked the state from beginning the ballot curing process, ordering the board of elections not to mail notices to any affected voters while litigation continues in federal court. Some reports say Riggs may still win the race despite these efforts to disenfranchise military and overseas voters.



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## VOTERS CONSIDER LIFE TERMS

Supreme court justices in forty-nine of the fifty states have some kind of term limit, with justices required to run for reelection upon the expiration of their terms in states that hold elections or face renomination or reconfirmation by their state's governor or legislature in those that don't. Only the five justices of the Rhode Island Supreme Court enjoy lifetime appointments to that state's highest court. But in 2024, the legislature of another state asked its voters to consider giving the state's supreme court justices lifetime terms.

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### Arizona Supreme Court Election

In April 2024, the Arizona Supreme Court issued a 4–2 ruling, joined by two justices up for reelection in 2024, that allowed a near-total 1864 ban on abortion to go into effect. Blowback to the court's spring decision was immediate and intense, and the court later stayed its own opinion until the legislature could enact a new law that overturned the ban. Voters would later pass a citizen-initiated constitutional amendment that enshrines the right to an abortion in the Arizona Constitution in the November election. During the spring 2024 legislative session, House Republicans introduced a proposal to place a question on Arizona ballots in 2024 that would ask voters to eliminate most judicial retention elections, including for supreme court justices. Critics said legislators who crafted the proposal were attempting to protect Justices Clint Bolick and Kathryn Hackett King from the fallout of the court's opinion that reinstated the Civil War-era abortion ban. The legislature passed the proposal to eliminate judicial elections and made the measure retroactive, which would have allowed Bolick or King to remain in their seats had voters approved the measure — even if one or both justices were not retained. Arizona voters retained Bolick and King in the November 2024 general election but defeated the proposal to eliminate judicial elections in the state by a margin of 77.7% to 22.3%.

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## SPENDING ROUNDUP

### *Reproductive Rights Spark Massive Spending*

National abortion rights groups have made no secret of the fact that their eagerness in recent cycles to spend thousands or even millions of dollars on state supreme court races is due to their belief that these courts are poised to play major roles in determining the degree of access to abortion in their states. Since the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health*, which eliminated national abortion protections and returned the question of abortion access to individual states, state courts have interpreted their constitutions to protect or limit abortion access and have approved or blocked voter-initiated ballot proposals that seek to address abortion access. Groups aligned with progressives targeted state supreme court elections in at least six states in 2024, including Arizona, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, North Carolina, and Ohio. The American Civil Liberties Union [pledged](#) to spend over \$25 million throughout 2024 to educate voters on races up and down the ballot, including state court races in Michigan, Montana, North Carolina, and Ohio, and Planned Parenthood Votes and the National Democratic Redistricting Committee partnered to [spend](#) another \$5 million in these states, as well as in Arizona and Texas. Conservative groups, including the Republican State Leadership Committee, [committed](#) more than \$2 million to state supreme court races in Michigan, Montana, and Ohio. The success of these groups' efforts was mixed, with progressives maintaining or expanding their majorities on the high courts in Michigan and Montana and Republicans significantly expanding their majority on the Ohio Supreme Court.

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### Arizona

Abortion rights activists announced they would launch a campaign to unseat two justices up for retention elections who had joined the court's majority to reinstate a Civil War-era abortion ban. The coalition seeking to remove the two justices worked with partner organizations but managed to raise less than \$17,500 in its effort to unseat the justices. Meanwhile, conservative interest groups mobilized to protect the justices, with the conservative Judicial Independence PAC raising over \$530,000 from billionaire Jeffrey Yass and other wealthy donors to convince voters to retain the justices. Bolick and King were retained by comfortable margins to new six-year terms on the court in the November 2024 general election.

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## Arkansas

The race between two incumbent associate justices for the open chief justice seat was notably competitive, with the two justices on opposite sides of an abortion-related opinion delivered by the court earlier in the year. That ruling blocked a proposed ballot measure seeking to enshrine abortion rights in the Arkansas Constitution from appearing on the ballot due to alleged errors on paperwork that documented the proposal's paid signature-gathering effort. Justice Rhonda Wood authored the majority opinion that kept the proposal off the ballot. At the same time, Justice Karen Baker wrote a scorching dissent that criticized the majority for keeping the issue out of the hands of voters. In their race for chief justice, Baker raised only \$21,000, while Wood raised over \$350,000 and received the endorsements of Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders (R), U.S. Sen. Tom Cotton (R), and the Republican Party of Arkansas. Despite Wood spending more than ten times what Baker spent, Arkansas voters chose Baker to serve as the court's next chief justice in the November 2024 general election, making her the first woman elected to lead the state's highest court.

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## Georgia

Gov. Brian Kemp (R) pledged \$500,000 through his leadership PAC, Georgians First Leadership Committee, to defend George Pinson, a conservative justice he appointed to the Georgia Supreme Court in 2022. Pinson was challenged by John Barrow, a former Georgia congressman who made abortion rights the centerpiece of his campaign by announcing his belief that the Georgia Constitution protects the right to an abortion. Both Pinson and Barrow received significant contributions to their campaigns, with Pinson raising over \$1.3 million and Barrow raising over \$800,000. Frontline Policy, a conservative Christian organization closely aligned with Kemp, also bought ads encouraging voters to support Pinson. Outside spenders that supported Barrow included Fair Fight Action, Planned Parenthood Southeast, Reproductive Freedom for All, and Georgians for Abortion Rights, a group created by the Georgia Senate Democratic Caucus that received nearly \$175,000 from a committee associated with Barrow's former congressional campaign. Pinson soundly defeated Barrow in the May 2024 election, maintaining the court's solidly conservative majority.

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## Kentucky

Pamela Goodwine made history when she became the first Black woman elected to the Kentucky Supreme Court in November 2024, defeating Frankfort attorney Erin Izzo. Though Kentucky's supreme court justices are elected in nonpartisan elections, Goodwine received the endorsement of Gov. Andy Beshear (D), whose leadership committees spent more than \$500,000 to support Goodwine's election. Beshear's federal leadership PAC, In This Together, donated \$335,000 to Kentuckians for Good Judges, a PAC supporting Goodwine, while his 501(c)(4) organization, Heckbent, contributed \$175,000. Another PAC, Liberty & Justice for Kentucky, spent an additional \$500,000 in support of Goodwine, largely with funds contributed by the Kentucky Education Association and Better Schools Kentucky, the Jefferson County Teachers Association's PAC. Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg also contributed \$150,000 to Liberty & Justice for Kentucky. Goodwine's campaign raised nearly \$315,000, while Izzo's campaign raised \$47,000. Over three-quarters of voters supported Goodwine in the November 2024 general election, and she will join the high court as it prepares to hear challenges to the state's two separate abortion bans.

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## Michigan

Michigan voters approved a constitutional amendment in 2022 that enshrined abortion rights in the state's constitution after the Michigan Supreme Court struck down a lawsuit that attempted to keep the proposal off the ballot. In 2024, Michigan's two supreme court elections saw perhaps the most outside spending of any state supreme court races in the 2024 election cycle, in addition to significant contributions directly to the candidates' campaigns. A political action committee associated with the Michigan Association for Justice, Justice for All PAC, spent nearly \$8 million to return incumbent Justice Kyra Harris Bolden to the court and help liberal law professor Kimberly Ann Thomas win an open seat vacated by the retirement of a conservative justice. The largest contributors to Justice for All included the Justice Project. This outside spending group contributed nearly \$4.4 million to Justice for All, as well as a \$1,000,000 contribution from Michael Bloomberg, \$950,000 from the Michigan Civic Action Fund, \$560,000 from State Victory Action, and contributions ranging from \$100,000 to \$150,000 from several labor unions, environmental organizations, and law firms. The ACLU spent \$2.3 million supporting the liberal supreme court candidates, and Planned Parenthood Votes and the National Democratic Redistricting Committee also spent heavily on the high court races. Bolden and Thomas, who largely campaigned together, reported a combined total of over \$4 million to their respective candidate committees. Their opponents, State Representative Andrew Fink and Circuit Court Judge Patrick O'Grady, raised a combined total of less than \$600,000. Independent expenditures supporting the two conservative candidates totaled less than \$800,000. In the November 2024 general election, Bolden and Thomas defeated Fink and O'Grady by more than twenty percentage points each, expanding the progressive majority on the Michigan Supreme Court.

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## Montana

The Montana Supreme Court has recently issued important rulings upholding access to abortion. Abortion rights groups spent heavily against the conservative candidates vying for two open seats on the Montana Supreme Court being vacated by retiring liberal justices. The ACLU [spent](#) over \$1.3 million on ads highlighting each candidate's position on abortion and other civil rights issues. Planned Parenthood Votes also spent more than \$1 million on ads highlighting the anti-abortion stances of attorney Corey Swanson and Judge Dan Wilson, the two conservative candidates. An independent expenditure committee called Montanans for Fair and Impartial Courts spent more than \$425,000 supporting Jerry Lynch, Swanson's opponent in the race for chief justice. Swanson defeated Lynch in the November 2024 general election. Still, Wilson was defeated by Katherine Bidegary, who also received support from abortion rights groups, and liberals maintained a narrow majority on the court.

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## North Carolina

North Carolina Supreme Court Justice Allison Riggs had a significant fundraising advantage over her opponent, Court of Appeals Judge Jefferson Griffin, in both direct campaign contributions and independent expenditures. Riggs raised over \$5.2 million, including over \$2 million from the North Carolina Democratic Party, and Griffin raised \$2.2 million, according to state campaign finance records. Abortion rights groups aligned with Riggs, such as the ACLU and Planned Parenthood Votes, [spent](#) more than \$4.1 million, while groups supporting Griffin spent around \$1.1 million. Riggs defeated Griffin by 734 votes out of more than 5.7 million votes cast. Griffin has refused to concede and has instead asked several courts to throw out more than 60,000 ballots. It is the only uncalled race from the 2024 election cycle in the nation.

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## Ohio

National groups targeting state supreme court races to protect abortion rights spent heavily in Ohio in 2024 after voters enshrined abortion rights in the state constitution in 2023. Ohioans for Judicial Integrity, an outside group supporting two incumbent Democratic Ohio Supreme Court justices and one Democratic candidate for an open seat, received a \$1 million contribution from Michael Bloomberg, as well as an additional combined \$1 million from the National Redistricting Action Fund, the Ohio Progressive Collaborative, and Educators for Ohio. The Republican State Leadership Committee's Judicial Fairness Initiative spent nearly \$1 million. Each of the six candidates, three Democrats and three Republicans, raised about \$1 million in direct contributions to their campaigns. The Republican candidates received nearly \$2 million in support from Ohioans for a Healthy Economy, a federal super PAC affiliated with the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, and \$500,000 from Fair Courts America, a super PAC funded by Richard Uihlein. All three Republican candidates were victorious in the November 2024 general election, shifting the balance of the Ohio Supreme Court to six Republicans and just one Democrat.

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## Oklahoma

Last year, the Oklahoma Supreme Court held that the Oklahoma Constitution protects the right to an abortion. In 2024, outside spending groups targeted the usually overlooked retention elections for justices of the state's highest court for civil matters, with several groups attempting to convince voters that the justices, all of whom were appointed to the court by Democratic governors, are too liberal and should be removed from the court. Conservative group People for Opportunity spent more than \$1.5 million calling on voters to remove three incumbent justices from the Oklahoma Supreme Court. People for Opportunity is affiliated with the conservative nonprofit think tank Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs. 46 Action, a super PAC linked to Gov. Kevin Stitt (R), spent more than \$239,000 urging voters to reject the three justices. Two groups supporting the retention of the justices, Hands Off Our Courts and Protect our Freedoms, spent a combined \$1.5 million urging voters to return the justices to the court. In total, outside groups spent more than \$3.6 million trying to influence the makeup of the court for civil matters. Ultimately, two justices were retained while a third, Yvonne Kauger, became the first Oklahoma Supreme Court justice in the state's history to be removed from the court. Stitt will appoint her replacement.

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## Texas

Texas has one of the most extreme abortion bans in the nation. Last year, a woman who was denied an abortion petitioned the court to allow her to receive the procedure within the state. The court denied her petition, forcing her to travel out of state to receive medically necessary care. The state's highest court for civil matters has since refused to clarify persistent questions surrounding the law that have continued to plague the state's healthcare providers. Find Out PAC, a political action committee seeking to hold anti-abortion Texas politicians accountable, launched a bid to unseat the three members of the Texas Supreme Court who were facing reelection in 2024 — all of whom had joined the court's majority to uphold the state's draconian abortion ban, airing ads targeting the three justices for their anti-abortion stances. While in past cycles, Democrats were not always able to field candidates to challenge incumbent Republican justices, each of the justices received Democratic challengers, who received support from pro-reproductive rights groups such as EMILY's List PAC. Despite the effort to hold the justices accountable for their role in upholding the state's abortion ban, all three were reelected by comfortable margins in the 2024 general election.



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## MOVEMENT ATTORNEY SPOTLIGHT

Movement lawyers work to promote civil rights and address the harms caused by structural racism and discrimination that are present in our legal system and seek to dismantle these structures to create a legal system that delivers equitable justice. Movement attorneys are underrepresented in the legal field. Accordingly, in combination with factors that work to uphold systemic injustice and white supremacy in our nation, movement judges are significantly underrepresented in both state and federal judiciaries. Various studies that have explored the composition of various federal and state benches have uncovered data indicating that up to 80% of judges in any level of the judiciary have experience representing corporations or working as former prosecutors, leaving little room for judges with experience as public defenders or advocates for civil rights. With other research showing that the previous legal experience of judges can have meaningful impacts on how they decide cases, we recognize that the presence of movement judges in our nation's judiciary — particularly on state court benches — is crucial to ensuring that people who interact with the justice system have a chance to be heard by a judge who might be equipped to empathize with their lived experience and factor such context into the decisions they make. Several highly experienced attorneys and judges were elected or appointed to state high courts in 2024.

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### Kentucky Supreme Court

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**Judge Pamela Goodwine**

Appellate District Court of Appeals Judge Pamela Goodwine's election to an open seat on the Kentucky Supreme Court in November 2024 made history in several important ways. Goodwine has over 25 years of experience as a judge, serving as a district court judge for four years, a circuit court judge for 15 years, and an appeals court judge for six years before being elected to the state's highest court. Before she became a judge, Goodwine served as a commissioner of the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights, later serving as the commission's chair. She worked in private practice, where her primary practice area was labor and employment law, and she was a member of the National Association of Human Rights Workers. Upon her swearing-in, Goodwine became the second Black justice to serve on the Kentucky Supreme Court and the first Black woman to join the bench. Her extensive career experience defending human rights will bring a much-needed diversity of professional expertise to Kentucky's highest court.

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## Michigan Supreme Court

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**Justice Kyra  
Harris Bolden**

Incumbent Associate Justice Kyra Harris Bolden was previously a member of the Michigan House of Representatives and worked as a criminal defense attorney in private practice before joining the legislature. Bolden was the first Black woman to serve on the court when she was sworn into office in 2023 and became the first Black woman to be elected to the court by a majority of the state's voters, serving the remainder of her term in the November 2024 election. Alongside Bolden, Kimberly Thomas was elected to an open seat on the court in 2024. Thomas was previously a professor at the University of Michigan Law School and co-founder and director of the law school's Juvenile Justice Clinic. Prior to her teaching career, she worked as a legal aid attorney, public defender, and journalist. Thomas will join Bolden on the court in bringing a career of experience defending the rights of those impacted by the criminal justice system in Michigan.

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## Minnesota Supreme Court

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**Judge Theodora Gaïtas**



**Judge Sarah Hennesy**

In April of 2024, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz (D) announced he would appoint Minnesota Court of Appeals Judge Theodora Gaïtas and Stearns County Chief Judge Sarah Hennesy to fill two impending vacancies on the Minnesota Supreme Court. Gaïtas and Hennesy both bring extensive backgrounds in public interest law to the state's highest court. Prior to becoming a judge, Gaïtas spent nearly two decades as a public defender before entering private practice, and Hennesy spent a decade of her career as a public defender and later worked as a legal aid attorney until becoming a district court judge. They will serve on the court until 2026, when they must run for a nonpartisan election to remain on the court. And Chief Justice Natalie Hudson, who had served on the court since 2015, was chosen by Walz in 2023 to fill the remainder of the chief justice's term and was elected to a full six-year term as the court's chief justice in 2024. Hudson was previously a judge on the Minnesota Court of Appeals and had worked in the offices of the Minnesota Attorney General and the St. Paul City Attorney. She also worked in private practice as an employment attorney and practiced housing law at Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services. The elevation of Hudson and the addition of Hennesy and Gaïtas have solidified a significant portion of Minnesota's high court bench with movement attorneys who will bring a fair approach to issues impacting some of the state's most underserved communities.

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## North Carolina Supreme Court

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**Justice Allison Riggs**

Justice Allison Riggs is a fierce voting and civil rights advocate. She spent her entire career at the Southern Coalition for Social Justice fighting for every North Carolinian's right to fairly access the ballot. She sought to protect voting rights at every level of the judiciary, from state courts to the U.S. Supreme Court. Prior to serving as a justice on the state supreme court, Gov. Roy Cooper (D) appointed Riggs to the court of appeals in 2022 and elevated her to the supreme court a year later.

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## Oregon Supreme Court

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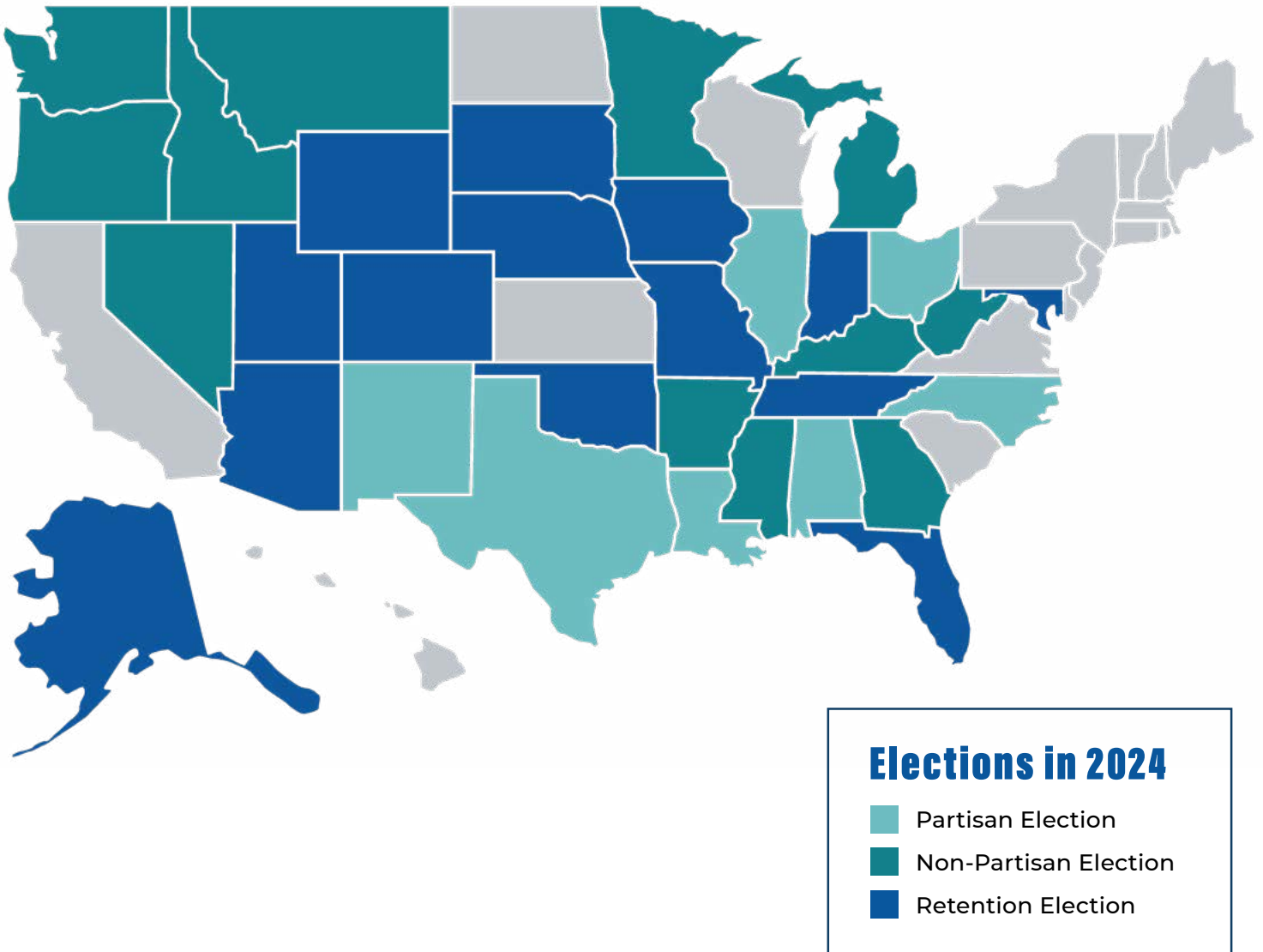


**Justice Aruna Masih**

Justice Aruna Masih of the Oregon Supreme Court brings a depth of knowledge in labor and employment law to the court. Masih's career defending labor and civil rights distinguished her throughout her nomination process. Prior to joining the bench, she defended employees' and unions' access to the Public Employee Retirement System. Masih also fought for civil rights by representing the Newberg Education Association in their challenge to the county's ban on political symbols like LGBTQ+ pride flags. Masih's landslide and unopposed election to the court only affirms voters' confidence in her extensive experience defending civil rights. With this election, she made history as the first Indian American and South Asian to be elected to the court as a justice.

# STATE SUPREME COURT ELECTIONS IN 2024

In 2024, 32 state supreme courts held elections for a total of 81 seats. Seven states held partisan elections for a total of 20 seats, 11 states held nonpartisan elections for a total of 31 seats, and 16 states held retention elections for a total of 32 seats.



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## Alabama

Alabama's supreme court justices are selected in partisan elections, meaning candidates appear with a party designation. In 2024, five supreme court seats were on the ballot in Alabama, including the chief justice. All four associate justice seats were unopposed. Only the chief justice seat was contested.

Then-Associate Justice Sarah Stewart, a Republican, won the election with 65.8%. Stewart defeated Fifth Judicial Circuit Judge Greg Griffin, a Democrat, who received 34.1%. Stewart spent her career as a private practitioner before joining the bench, first on the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit Court and later the state supreme court. Griffin was a judge on the Fifth Judicial Circuit and previously served as chief legal counsel for the Alabama Board of Pardons and Paroles, as well as Assistant Attorney General of Alabama.

To fill Stewart's seat, Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals Judge Chris McCool ran uncontested. Incumbent Justices Tommy Bryan, William Sellers, and Jay Mitchell were re-elected to the bench unopposed.

Stewart, the newly elected chief justice, [joined](#) the Alabama Supreme Court's controversial ruling declaring frozen embryos as children. Notably, when Stewart was first appointed to the court as associate justice in 2018, she [promised](#) to follow "conservative principles" on the bench.

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## Alaska

The five justices of the Alaska Supreme Court are selected using the assisted appointment method. A judicial nominating commission selects a slate of candidates from which the governor chooses a finalist. Justices serve at least three years on the court before running in retention elections to serve an additional 10-year term.

Two justices who were appointed in recent years ran to serve full terms on the court. Associate Justice Dario Borghesan, appointed to the court in 2020 by Governor Mike Dunleavy (R), previously served as Chief Assistant Attorney General of the Opinions, Appeals, and Ethics Section of the Alaska Department of Law. Associate Justice Jennifer Henderson, appointed in 2021 by Governor Dunleavy, worked in the Anchorage District Attorney's Office and private practice, focusing on personal injury defense and labor and employment matters, before becoming a district court and superior court judge.

In the November 2024 election, Borghesan was retained by 60.6% of voters, and Henderson was retained by 60.1% of voters. They may remain on the court until at least the expiration of their terms in 2035.

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## Arizona

Arizona's seven supreme court justices are chosen using the assisted appointment method, with the governor choosing a finalist from among at least three candidates forwarded by a judicial nominating commission. After serving at least two years, justices run in retention elections to serve an additional six-year term.

In 2024, two justices appointed to the court by Gov. Doug Ducey (R) ran for retention to the court. Associate Justice Clint Bolick was appointed to the court in 2016. Previously, he worked for numerous conservative policy think tanks, including the Goldwater Institute, the Institute for Justice, and the Landmark Center for Civil Rights, as well as at the U.S. Department of Justice. Associate Justice Kathryn Hackett King, appointed to the court in 2021, previously served as Deputy General Counsel for Ducey's office and represented employers in matters including discrimination, harassment, retaliation, wage and hour issues, and unfair labor practices, prior to entering public service.

In the November 2024 general election, 58.2% of voters retained Bolick, and 59.3% retained King. Bolick may remain on the court until his mandatory retirement in December 2027, and King may remain on the court until the expiration of her term in 2031.

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## Arkansas

Arkansas's supreme court justices are elected in nonpartisan elections. In 2024, two of the court's sitting associate justices sought the open chief justice seat, which was vacated due to the retirement of the previous chief justice.

In the runoff election for chief justice of the court, Justice Karen Baker defeated Justice Rhonda Wood. Baker won with 52.8% of the vote, while Wood received 47.3%.

Baker was elected to the court in 2010. She previously served as a judge on the Arkansas Court of Appeals and as a chancery and juvenile judge. Before her judicial service, Baker was a public defender. Wood was elected to the court in 2014. Prior to that, she served as a judge on the Court of Appeals and the 20th Judicial District. She also worked as an assistant dean at the University of Arkansas Little Rock's Bowen School of Law. Baker and Wood [advanced](#) to a runoff November election after the March judicial election was too close to call. Between the March and November elections, the Arkansas Supreme Court [delivered](#) a landmark decision preventing a ballot measure attempting to codify abortion in the state from appearing on the ballot. In its decision, the court upheld a ruling from state election officials that found the group sponsoring the initiative failed to meet the required number of signatures. Wood, the November winner, [joined](#) the majority opinion, while Baker dissented.



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## Colorado

The governor appoints the seven justices of the Colorado Supreme Court to fill vacancies and run in retention elections after they have served at least two years on the court. Justices run for an additional 10-year term to remain on the court. Chief Justice Monica Márquez and Justice Brian Boatright sought retention in an election for additional full terms. Justice Maria Berkenkotter ran for retention for a full term after her appointment in 2020.

Colorado voters retained all three justices up for election. Márquez was retained with 64.06% of the vote. Boatright won 62.82% of the vote. Berkenkotter won 66.80% of the vote.

Márquez previously served as Deputy Attorney General, Assistant Solicitor General, and Assistant Attorney General for the Public Officials Unit and the Criminal Appellate Section at the Colorado Attorney General's Office. She worked in private practice before her time in public service. Before the supreme court, Boatright was a judge in the First Judicial District Court and a deputy district attorney in the same district. Berkenkotter worked at the Judicial Arbiter Group after serving as a judge in the 20th Judicial District Court. Before becoming a judge, Berkenkotter led the Antitrust, Consumer Protection, and Tobacco Litigation units at the Colorado Attorney General's Office.

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## Florida

The seven justices of the Florida Supreme Court are appointed using the assisted appointment method, with a nine-member judicial nominating commission submitting a list of at least three candidates to the governor, who then selects a finalist. Justices run in retention elections after serving at least one year on the court and stand for retention to additional six-year terms to remain on the court.

Two justices recently appointed by Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) stood for retention to full terms on the court. Associate Justice Renatha Francis, appointed in 2022, was previously a judge on the Palm Beach and Miami-Dade circuit courts and worked in private practice on complex commercial litigation matters before joining the bench. Associate Justice Meredith Sasso, appointed in 2023, was previously a judge of the Fifth and Sixth District Courts of Appeal, chief deputy counsel to Florida Gov. Rick Scott (R), and worked in private practice on general liability, negligence, and complex commercial litigation matters before entering public service.

In the November 2024 general election, 63.1% of voters retained Francis, and 62.3% retained Sasso. They may remain on the court until at least the expiration of their terms in 2031.

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## Georgia

Supreme court justices in Georgia are selected by nonpartisan election. In the case of interim vacancies, justices are appointed by the governor from a slate provided by the Judicial Nominating Commission. Those appointees must run for election in the next general election, held at least six months after their appointment.

There was only one contested election out of the four seats up for election. Justice Michael Boggs, Justice John Ellington, and Justice Nels Peterson ran unopposed and were easily elected to the court. Incumbent Justice Andrew Pinson, who was appointed to the state supreme court in 2022 by Gov. Brian Kemp (R), won the election to the Georgia Supreme Court with 645,048 votes (55%). Pinson defeated challenger and former Democratic Rep. John Barrow, who had 528,585 votes (45%). Pinson's election continued the pattern of Georgia supreme court incumbents winning re-election.

Pinson began his career in private practice at Jones Day, followed by stints at the Office of the Georgia Attorney General and as Solicitor General, before being appointed to the state supreme court. Barrow worked in private

practice before being elected as a commissioner on the Athens-Clarke County Commission. Barrow served as a representative for Georgia's 12th congressional district in the United States House of Representatives from 2005 to 2015. After Congress, he taught at the University of Georgia and worked as a pro bono staff attorney at Atlanta Legal Aid.

Barrow centered abortion rights and reproductive health care in his campaign for state supreme court. Barrow criticized Pinson for his tenure as Georgia's solicitor general and claimed that Pinson was responsible for Georgia's support of Mississippi in *Dobbs v. Jackson*, the case that overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Pinson gained endorsements from the Georgia Chamber of Commerce and Frontline Policy, which advocates for anti-LGBTQ+ policies. Fair Fight and Reproductive Freedom for All endorsed former Rep. John Barrow.

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## Idaho

Justices of the Idaho Supreme Court are chosen in nonpartisan elections. In the event of a midterm vacancy, the governor appoints a replacement with the help of a judicial nominating commission. The appointee may serve the remainder of the partial term and must then run in nonpartisan elections for additional terms on the court.

Chief Justice G. Richard Bevan ran for re-election to the Idaho Supreme Court in 2024. Bevan was first appointed to the court in 2017 by Gov. Butch Otter (R). Bevan was previously a district court judge and worked as a prosecutor and in private practice before joining the bench. He was elected to a full term on the court in 2018 in a nonpartisan election and subsequently elected by his colleagues to serve as the court's chief justice in 2021. No candidates filed to challenge Bevan, and he was reelected unopposed to a second six-year term on the court in the general election on May 21, 2024. He may remain on the court at least until his term expires in 2031, though his term as chief justice will expire in 2028.

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## Illinois

Illinois's seven supreme court justices represent five judicial districts with roughly equal populations within the state. Three justices represent the Cook County district, and one justice represents each of the four remaining districts; the residents of each judicial district elect the justices who represent their district. The court's justices are elected in partisan elections to serve 10-year terms on the court. Upon completing their first term, justices run in retention elections to remain on the court for an additional 10-year term. The sitting justices themselves appoint new justices to fill vacancies, with appointed justices serving up to two years before running in a partisan election to remain on the court.

In the November 2024 general election, two recently appointed justices ran in partisan races for full terms on the court. Incumbent Associate Justice Joy Cunningham, a Democrat appointed in 2022 by the Illinois Supreme Court, was previously a judge of the Illinois Appellate Court and Circuit Court of Cook County and worked in health systems administration and private practice before becoming a judge. Incumbent Associate Justice Lisa Holder White, a Republican appointed by the court in 2022, previously served as a judge of the Appellate Court and the Sixth Judicial Circuit Court and worked as a private practice attorney, assistant public defender, and assistant state's attorney before becoming a judge.

Each justice defeated a primary challenger in March but fielded no partisan opponent in the November 2024 general election, and both Cunningham and Holder White were elected to full 10-year terms on the court. They may remain on the court until at least the expiration of their terms in 2035.

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## Indiana

The five justices of the Indiana Supreme Court are chosen using the assisted appointment method, with a judicial nominating commission comprising six members who represent three geographical districts selecting a slate of candidates from which the governor chooses a finalist. Justices run in retention elections after serving for at least two years and run for additional 10-year terms to remain on the court. Chief Justice Loretta Rush and Justice Mark Massa ran for additional full terms. Justice Derek Molter sought election for a full term on the court.

Rush won retention with 71.40%. Massa won retention with 69.13%. Molter won retention with 69.59%. Rush previously served as judge of the Tippecanoe Superior Court and worked in private practice. Massa worked as executive director of the Indiana Criminal Justice Institute, assistant U.S. attorney in the Southern District of Indiana, general counsel to the office of Gov. Daniels, and at the Marion County prosecutor's office before joining the bench. Molter served as judge of the Indiana Court of Appeals and worked in private practice before serving as judge.

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## Iowa

Iowa's seven supreme court justices are chosen using the assisted appointment method, with a 17-member judicial nominating commission selecting a slate of candidates from which the governor chooses a finalist. Justices run in retention elections after serving on the court for at least one year and run for additional eight-year terms to remain on the court.

Incumbent Associate Justice David May, whose term expired in 2024, was retained for a second full term on the court. May was appointed to the court in 2012 by Governor Kim Reynolds (R) and had previously served as a district court judge and a judge of the Iowa Court of Appeals. He practiced commercial litigation and insurance defense before becoming a judge.

In the November 2024 general election, May was returned to the court by 63.3% of voters. He may remain on the court until at least the expiration of his term in 2033.

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## Kentucky

Kentucky's seven supreme court justices each represent judicial districts with roughly equal populations within the state, with the residents of each judicial district electing the justices who represent their district. Open seats on the seven-member Kentucky Supreme Court are chosen in nonpartisan elections. Vacancies on the court are filled using the assisted appointment method, in which the governor appoints a replacement from a list of finalists recommended by the state's judicial nominating commission. Justices serve for at least three months and must then run in a nonpartisan election to fill the remainder of the term. Justices run in nonpartisan elections to serve additional eight-year terms.

In 2024, the term of the justice representing the state's 5th supreme court District expired following his retirement from the court. Two candidates ran for the seat in the nonpartisan general election. Erin Izzo, an attorney who worked in private practice on civil rights, labor and employment law, workers' compensation, and personal injury matters faced fifth Appellate District Court of Appeals Judge Pamela Goodwine, who was previously a circuit court and district court judge and served as commissioner and later chair of the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights prior to her election to the bench.

In the November 2024 general election, Goodwine defeated Izzo with 77.9% of the vote to become the first Black woman elected to the Kentucky Supreme Court. Goodwine may serve on the court for at least the remainder of her term, which expires in 2033.

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## Louisiana

The seven justices of the Louisiana Supreme Court are chosen in partisan elections to serve 10-year terms. Louisiana is one of only a few states that elects its supreme court justices in geographical judicial districts. In the spring of 2024, the state's judicial districts were redrawn for the second time in one hundred years to create a second majority-Black district, District 1. The new seat was up for election in November 2024. One candidate ran unopposed in the partisan general election to fill the seat.

Democratic candidate Judge John Michael Guidry won unopposed to the Louisiana Supreme Court's 1st District. Guidry served as a judge on the Louisiana Court of Appeal, First Circuit, and previously served as a member of the Louisiana House of Representatives and the state Senate before his election to the court. Guidry is the fourth Black justice to be elected to the Louisiana Supreme Court.

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## Maryland

The seven justices of the Maryland Supreme Court are appointed through a process that involves the governor selecting a finalist from a list of candidates submitted by a judicial nomination commission, which is then confirmed by the state senate. Justices serve on the court for at least one year and then stand for a retention election to full eight-year terms.

Three incumbent justices with terms expiring in 2024 stood for retention to the court. Chief Justice Matthew Fader, appointed to the court in 2022 by Gov. Larry Hogan (R), was previously chief judge of the Court of Special Appeals and worked in the Civil Litigation Division of the Office of Attorney General and as a trial attorney in the Civil Division of the U.S. Department of Justice before becoming a judge. Associate Justice Angela Eaves, appointed by Hogan in 2022, was previously a judge of the Third Circuit Court and an associate judge of the Ninth District Court of Maryland and worked as assistant attorney general for the state of Maryland and a staff attorney at the Legal Aid Bureau Associate prior to joining the bench. Appointed in 2013 by Gov. Martin O'Malley (D), Associate Justice Shirley Marie Watts was previously a judge of the Maryland Court of Special Appeals and an associate judge of the Maryland Eighth Circuit Court and worked as an administrative law judge in the Office of Hearing and Appeals of the Social Security Administration, as a public defender, and as an assistant state's attorney before becoming a judge.

In the November 2024 general election, 81.5% of voters retained Fader, 79.8% retained Eaves, and 89.1% retained Watts. Eaves and Watts may remain on the court until each reaches the age of 70 in 2029, while Fader may remain on the court at least until the expiration of his term in 2033.



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## Michigan

Michigan's method for choosing its supreme court justices is unique among the states. At their respective state party conventions, delegates to the state's major political parties nominate candidates for seats on the Michigan Supreme Court. Despite being selected by their respective political parties, the candidates run in nonpartisan elections. In the event of a midterm vacancy, the governor appoints a replacement, who must then run in the next general election to fill the remainder of the term. Justices run in nonpartisan elections to serve additional eight-year terms on the court.

In 2024, one open seat and one seat held by an incumbent justice who was recently appointed to fill a vacancy were on the ballot. Incumbent Associate Justice Kyra Harris Bolden was previously a member of the Michigan House of Representatives and worked as a criminal defense attorney in private practice before joining the legislature. She was appointed to the court in 2023 by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D) to fill the remainder of a term that expires in 2029. Democrats nominated Bolden to seek the remainder of her term. She was challenged for her seat by Fifth Circuit Court Judge Patrick O'Grady, who was nominated by Republicans and had previously served as a prosecuting attorney and a Michigan State Police officer. For the open seat, Democrats nominated Kimberly Thomas, a professor at the University of Michigan Law School and co-founder and director of the law school's Juvenile Justice Clinic, and Republicans nominated state Rep. Andrew Fink, previously a private practitioner in real estate, landlord-tenant, small business, and local government matters at family firm and as a judge advocate for U.S. Marine Corps.

In the November 2024 general election, Bolden defeated O'Grady with 61.5% of the vote, and Thomas defeated Fink with 61.1% of the vote. Bolden may remain on the court until at least the expiration of her term in 2029, and Thomas may remain on the court until at least the expiration of her term in 2033.

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## Minnesota

Minnesota's supreme court justices are chosen in nonpartisan elections. The governor fills vacancies on the court. Justices who are appointed to the court serve for at least one year and run in nonpartisan elections to serve additional six-year terms.

The terms of three justices of the Minnesota Supreme Court expire in 2024. Chief Justice Natalie Hudson, who had served on the court since 2015, was chosen by Gov. Tim Walz (D) in 2023 to fill the remainder of the chief justice's term, which ended in 2024, and subsequently ran for a full six-year term as the court's chief justice. Hudson was previously a judge on the Minnesota Court of Appeals and had worked in the offices of the Minnesota Attorney General and the St. Paul City Attorney. She was challenged by Stephen Emery, a perennial candidate who works as a legal writer and analyst. Associate Justice Karl Procaccini was appointed in 2023 by Gov. Tim Walz (D) and previously served as Walz's general counsel and deputy chief of staff. Matthew Hanson challenged him, a trusts, estates, and wealth management attorney who earned endorsements from local Republicans in two previous elections. Associate Justice Anne McKeig, who was appointed to the court in 2016 by Gov. Mark Dayton (D) and was previously a Hennepin County judge and prosecutor, ran unopposed.

In the November 2024 general election, Hudson defeated Emery with 63.4% of the vote, and Procaccini defeated Hanson with 56.6% of the vote; McKeig received 98.7% of the votes. Hudson may continue to serve as the court's chief justice until she reaches the state's mandatory retirement age of 70 in 2027. McKeig and Procaccini may serve on the court for at least the remainder of their terms, which expire in 2031.

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# Mississippi

The nine justices of the Mississippi Supreme Court are chosen in nonpartisan elections. Justices are elected to the court from three judicial districts, with three justices representing each district. Vacancies are filled by the governor, with the appointee serving for two years before running in a nonpartisan election to serve the remainder of their term. Justices run in nonpartisan elections to serve additional eight-year terms on the court.

The terms of four justices of the Mississippi Supreme Court expired in 2024, and all four incumbent justices sought re-election. In the five-way race for the Central District, Place 3 seat, Associate Justice Jim Kitchens, previously a prosecutor, received four challengers: Republican State Senator Jenifer Branning, Byron Carter, a private practitioner, Ceola James, a former Judge of the Mississippi Court of Appeals, and Abby Robinson, a private practitioner. For the Southern District Place 2 seat, Associate Justice Dawn Beam, a former prosecutor appointed to the court in 2016 by Gov. Phil Bryant (R), was challenged by D'Iberville Municipal Court Judge David Sullivan, who also works as a public defender and criminal defense attorney. Northern District Place 1 Associate Justice Robert Chamberlin, who was first elected to the supreme court in 2016 and formerly served as a 17th Circuit District judge and a member of the Mississippi Senate, received no opponent. Northern District Place 2 Associate Justice James Maxwell, appointed in 2016 by Gov. Phil Bryant (R) and previously a judge on the Mississippi Court of Appeals and assistant U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Mississippi, was also unopposed.

The state does not hold primaries in judicial races; instead, a runoff election is held three weeks after the general election if no candidate receives a majority of the general election votes. In the November 2024 general election, Chamberlin was re-elected to the court for the Northern District, Place 1 seat, and Maxwell was re-elected for the Northern District, Place 2 seat. Sullivan defeated Beam for the Southern District Place 2 seat with 54.8% of the vote, and no candidate earned a majority of votes in the Central District for the Place 3 seat. Kitchens and Branning, the top two vote getters, headed to a runoff election on November 26, in which Branning defeated Kitchens with 50.6% of votes. With no mandatory retirement age for Mississippi judges, Branning, Sullivan, Chamberlin, and Maxwell may remain on the court at least until the expiration of their terms in 2033.

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## Missouri

The seven justices of the Missouri Supreme Court are selected using the assisted appointment method, in which a judicial nominating commission sends a list of at least three candidates to the governor, who then selects a finalist. Justices serve on the court for at least one year and then stand for a retention election to additional 12-year terms on the court.

In 2024, two associate justices appointed to the court in 2023 by Gov. Mike Parson (R) stood for retention to the court. Associate Justice Ginger Gooch was previously a judge of the Missouri Court of Appeals and worked in private practice before joining the bench. Associate Justice Kelly Broniec was previously a judge of the Eastern District Court of Appeals and the Montgomery County Circuit Court and worked as a county prosecutor and in private practice prior to becoming a judge. In the November 2024 general election, 62.3% of voters retained Gooch, and 63.1% retained Broniec. Each may remain on the court at least until the expiration of their terms in 2037.

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## Montana

Montana elects its state supreme court justices to eight-year terms in nonpartisan elections, meaning candidates do not have a partisan designation next to their name. Chief Justice Mike McGrath and Associate Justice Dirk Sandefur did not seek reelection to their seats. There was an open contest to replace them. Two candidates for each seat advanced from the primary election to the November general election.

For Chief Justice of the Montana Supreme Court, Cory Swanson defeated Jerry Lynch, winning 53.8% of the vote. Judge Katherine Bidegaray won the election for associate justice with 54.1%. Swanson's victory shifts the partisan control from 5D-2R to 4D-3R. While the races are officially non-partisan, outside expenditures by issue advocacy groups help inform potential partisan leanings.

Swanson worked as the Broadwater County Attorney and Deputy Attorney General in the Montana Department of Justice. He also worked in private practice after serving in the Montana Army National Guard. Lynch was a U.S. magistrate judge after working in private practice.

Bidegaray served as judge on Montana's 7th Judicial District Court. Before her time on the court, she worked in private practice and at the Montana Insurance Department and the Montana State Auditor's Office. Wilson served as judge on the 11th Judicial District Court after working in private practice and as a county prosecutor.

Although Montana's judicial elections are nonpartisan, Lynch and Bidegaray garnered support from labor unions and progressive-aligned groups, including Reproductive Freedom for All and Montana Conservation Voters. Conservative-leaning groups, such as Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America and the Montana Chamber of Commerce, supported Swanson and Wilson.

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## Nebraska

Nebraska's seven supreme court justices are appointed using the assisted appointment method. Nebraska has six judicial districts, with each district represented on the supreme court by one associate justice. The six associate justices, along with the court's chief justice, comprise the seven-member court. The state's Judicial Nominating Commission has separate committees for each seat, including the chief judgeship. Justices run in retention elections after serving at least three years and run for additional six-year terms to remain on the court. Justice Stephanie Stacy sought election to a second full term on the court.

Nebraska voters retained Justice Stephanie Stacy to the state supreme court by 76.04%. Stacy served as judge of the Third Judicial District and worked in private practice before the bench.

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## Nevada

Nevada Supreme Court justices are elected in nonpartisan elections. Justices Elissa Cadish and Lidia Stiglich sought re-election to additional terms on the court. Justice Patricia Lee sought election to a full term after her appointment in 2022.

All Nevada Supreme Court justices running for election to the court ran unopposed. Cadish won re-election to the court with 69.72%. Stiglich won re-election with 70.73%. Lee, appointed in 2022, won an election to a full term on the court with 70.4% of the vote.

Cadish served as a judge for the Eighth Judicial District Court and practiced law in private, focusing on commercial litigation and employment law. Stiglich served as a judge of the Second Judicial District Court, the Second Judicial Probate Court, and the Youth Offender Drug Court and worked in private practice. Lee worked in private practice before her appointment to the court and is the first Black woman and first Asian American to sit on the Nevada Supreme Court.

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## New Mexico

Vacancies on the five-member New Mexico Supreme Court are filled using the assisted appointment method, in which the governor selects a finalist from a list of candidates submitted by a judicial nominating commission. After serving for at least one year on the court, justices must win the first general partisan election after their appointment to serve the remainder of their unexpired term. To serve additional eight-year terms, justices must receive at least 57% of the vote in a retention election.

One justice of the New Mexico Supreme Court ran for election to a full eight-year term on the court in 2024. Associate Justice Briana Zamora was appointed to the court by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham (D) in 2021 and successfully ran as a Democrat to fill the remainder of the term in 2022. Zamora was previously a judge of the Bernalillo County District Court and Metropolitan Court and worked as an assistant attorney general, a prosecutor, and in private practice before becoming a judge. She stood for retention in the November 2024 general election, in which she was retained by 70.6% of voters. She may remain on the court until at least the expiration of her term in 2033.

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## North Carolina

North Carolina's supreme court justices are elected in partisan elections to eight-year terms. For interim vacancies, the governor appoints a justice to the court. That individual must stand for election for a full term to the bench.

Justice Allison Riggs, appointed in 2023, won an election to a full term on the North Carolina Supreme Court. Riggs defeated challenger Judge Jefferson Griffin by just 734 votes. She won 2,770,412 total votes, representing 50.01% of the total.

Riggs served as a judge on the statewide court of appeals and spent her career at the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, where she litigated civil and voting rights cases. Griffin served as a judge on the court of appeals and Wake County District Court. He also worked in the Wake County District Attorney's Office.

This race remains uncalled while Griffin is attempting to [disenfranchise](#) 60,000 North Carolinians who legally cast their ballot in the election.

The North Carolina GOP also attacked Riggs during her campaign. The future of reproductive rights in North Carolina was a central issue in the race. After Riggs released ads pointing to the fact that the next justice could be in charge of deciding the future of abortion rights, the state Republicans [launched](#) an ethics complaint against her before the Judicial Standards Commission (JSC). The legislature recently [reshaped](#) the JSC in the state budget to give Chief Justice Paul Newby (R) more control over it. The JSC was also [weaponized](#) to attack the court's other Democratic Justice, Anita Earls, while also [refusing](#) to enforce ethics standards against conservative justices.



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## Ohio

Justices of the seven-member Ohio Supreme Court are selected in partisan elections. Vacancies on the court are filled through appointment by the governor, with justices serving for at least one year before running in partisan elections to fill the remainder of their term. Justices run in partisan elections for additional six-year terms on the court.

The terms of three Ohio Supreme Court justices expired in 2024. Associate Justice Melody Stewart previously served as a judge of the Eighth District Court of Appeals and worked in academia, as a civil defense litigator, and as a municipal law director before becoming a judge. Associate Justice Michael Donnelly previously served as a judge of the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas and the Mental Health and Developmental Disability Court and was an assistant Cuyahoga County prosecutor and private practitioner before joining the bench. Both incumbent justices, who are Democrats, were first elected to the court in 2018, and both ran for a second six-year term on the court. Associate Justice Joe Deters was appointed to the court in 2023 by Gov. Mike DeWine (R) to fill a term that expires in 2028. Deters previously served as a prosecutor for Hamilton County, as the treasurer of the state of Ohio, and as the Hamilton County Clerk of Court. Rather than run to fill the remainder of his term, Deters challenged Stewart as a Republican for a full six-year term on the court. Donnelly was challenged by Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas Judge Megan Shanahan, a Republican who previously served as a Hamilton County Municipal Court judge and a felony-level criminal prosecutor. For the open partial term, Eighth District Court of Appeals Judge Lisa Forbes ran as a Democrat and Franklin County Court of Common Pleas Judge Dan Hawkins ran as a Republican.

In the November 2024 general election, Deters defeated Stewart with 55.2% of the vote; Shanahan defeated Donnelly with 55.7% of the vote; and Hawkins defeated Forbes with 55.1% of the vote. The Republican sweep shifted the partisan balance of the Ohio Supreme Court from 4–3 to 6–1 in favor of Republicans. Hawkins may remain on the court at least until the expiration of the partial term in 2028. Shanahan may remain on the court at least until her term expires in 2030. Deters may remain on the court until 2030, when he will be required to retire from the court because individuals over 70 may not run for judicial office in Ohio.

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## Oklahoma

Oklahoma is one of two states with separate courts of last resort for civil and criminal appeals. The Oklahoma Supreme Court is the court of last resort for civil matters in Oklahoma. The court's nine justices are selected using the assisted appointment method, with the governor choosing a finalist from a slate of candidates recommended by a judicial nominating commission. Justices serve on the court for at least one year before standing for retention election to remain on the court. Justices run in retention elections to serve additional six-year terms on the court.

In 2024, three justices with expiring terms stood for retention to new terms. Associate Justice James Edmondson, appointed to the court in 2003 by Gov. Brad Henry (D), was previously a district court judge and a prosecutor. Associate Justice Noma Gurich was appointed to the court by Henry in 2011 and was previously a judge of the Oklahoma Workers' Compensation Court. Associate Justice Yvonne Kauger was appointed to the court in 1984 by Gov. George Nigh (D) and previously worked as a staff attorney to the Oklahoma Supreme Court.

In the November 2024 general election, 51% of voters retained Edmondson and 50.3% of voters retained Gurich, returning both justices to the court for new six-year terms that will expire in 2031. However, 50.2% of voters opted not to return Kauger to the court, making her the first supreme court justice in Oklahoma's history to be removed from the court. Gov. Kevin Stitt (R) appointed Travis Jett, who will stand for retention election in 2026, to replace Kauger.

The Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals is the court of last resort for criminal matters in Oklahoma. The nine judges of the court are chosen using the assisted appointment method, with a judicial nominating commission recommending candidates to the governor, who chooses a finalist. After serving for at least one year on the court, judges stand for retention election to the court and run in retention elections for additional six-year terms on the court.

Three judges with expiring terms stood for retention election to new terms on the court in 2024. Associate Judge David Lewis, appointed to the court by Henry in 2005, was previously a district court judge and a county prosecutor. Associate Judge William Musseman, appointed in 2022 by Stitt, also previously worked as a district court judge and county prosecutor. Associate Judge Scott Rowland, appointed by Gov. Mary Fallin (R) in 2017, was previously a county and state prosecutor and general counsel to the Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

In the general election, 64.3% of voters retained Lewis, 63.7% retained Musseman, and 59.1% retained Rowland. Each judge may remain on the court at least until the expiration of their terms in 2031.

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## Oregon

The seven justices of the Oregon Supreme Court are chosen in nonpartisan elections. Justices serve six-year terms and run in nonpartisan elections to serve additional terms. In the case of a vacancy, the governor appoints a replacement who must stand for a nonpartisan election in the next general election. The terms of five justices are expiring in 2024. Justice Aruna Masih, appointed in 2023, ran for her first election to a full term on the court. The other four incumbent justices ran for reelection.

All five Oregon Supreme Court justices up for election ran unopposed. Justice Stephen Bushong won re-election with 97.8% of voters electing him. Justice Rebecca Duncan gained 97.8% of the vote. Justice Meagan Flynn won 97.9% of votes. Justice Bronson James won with 98%. Masih, appointed in 2023, won election to a full term with 97.8% of the vote.

Flynn previously served as a judge on the court of appeals and worked in private practice. Duncan served as judge on the court of appeals and worked as a public defender for Washington and Multnomah Counties. Bushong served as a circuit court judge in Multnomah County after working for the Oregon Department of Justice and in private practice. James served as a judge on the court of appeals and the Multnomah County Circuit Court. He also worked in private practice focusing on criminal defense, civil rights, and immigration and as a public defender. Masih worked in private practice focusing on worker and labor rights.

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## South Dakota

Judges of the South Dakota Supreme Court are appointed to the court by the governor with the assistance of a judicial nominating commission that recommends candidates to the governor. Justices stand in retention elections after serving at least three years on the court and stand for retention to subsequent full terms lasting eight years. In 2024, one justice appointed in 2020 ran for retention election.

Justice Scott Myren won retention with 79% of yes votes. Myren previously served as a presiding judge for the Fifth Judicial Circuit, an administrative judge for Office of Administrative Hearings, and a magistrate judge for the Sixth Judicial Circuit. He also worked as a staff attorney for the South Dakota Supreme Court and in private practice.

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## Tennessee

Tennessee's seven supreme court justices are selected through the assisted appointment method, in which a judicial nominating commission provides a list of candidates from which the governor chooses a finalist. Justices then must stand for retention in the next general election at least 30 days after their appointment to serve the remainder of the term. Justices run in retention elections for an additional eight-year terms on the court.

Justice Dwight Tartwater was retained by voters with 72.9% of the vote. Before his appointment to the state supreme court, Tartwater worked as counsel to Gov. Bill Haslam (R) and in private practice.

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## Texas

Texas is one of two states with separate courts of last resort for civil and criminal appeals. The Texas Supreme Court is the court of last resort for civil matters in Texas. The court's nine justices are chosen in partisan elections. In the event of a vacancy on the court, the governor appoints a replacement, who must be confirmed by the Senate. Justices appointed to fill vacancies serve until the next general election and may then run in partisan elections to fill the remainder of the term and may run in partisan elections for additional six-year terms on the court.

In 2024, three incumbent Republican justices with expiring terms ran for reelection to the court. Each incumbent justice was challenged by a Democratic opponent and one justice also received a Libertarian opponent.

Associate Justice Jimmy Blacklock was first appointed to the court in 2018 by Gov. Greg Abbott (R) and previously served as Abbott's general counsel and in the office of the Texas Attorney General. He was challenged for the Place 2 seat by 180th Criminal District Court Judge DaSean Jones, a Democrat who was previously a judge advocate in the U.S. Army Reserve. Associate Justice John Devine, first elected to the court in 2012, previously served as a district and county court judge and worked at the Shell Oil Company. He was challenged for the Place 4 seat by District Court Judge Christine Weems, a Democrat who previously worked as a personal injury and complex civil litigator. Associate Justice Jane Bland, previously a district and appeals court judge who was appointed to the court in 2019 by Abbott, was challenged for her Place 6 seat by Fifth District Court of Appeals Judge Bonnie Lee Goldstein, a Democrat who was previously a civil and municipal court judge and a civil litigator, and Libertarian David Roberson, a tax attorney, litigator, and mediator.

In the November 2024 general election, voters reelected all three incumbent Republican justices. Blacklock defeated Jones with 58.3% of the vote, Devine defeated Weems with 57.4% of the vote, and Bland defeated Goldstein and Roberson with 56.4% of the vote. Each justice may remain on the court at least until the expiration of their terms in 2031. Finley, a criminal defender, for the Place 8 seat.

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## Texas

The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals is the court of last resort for criminal matters in Texas. The court's nine judges are chosen in partisan elections. In the event of a vacancy on the court, the governor appoints a replacement, who must be confirmed by the Senate. Judges appointed to fill vacancies serve until the next general election and may then run in partisan elections to fill the remainder of the term and may run in partisan elections to serve additional six-year terms on the court.

Three seats, including the presiding judgeship, were open on the court in the 2024 general election following the defeat of three longtime incumbent judges in the March Republican primary. Holly Taylor, an assistant district attorney for wrongful convictions and former staff and rules attorney for the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, ran as a Democrat against Republican David Schenck, a private practitioner and former judge of the Texas Fifth District Court of Appeals, for the presiding judgeship. For the Place 7 seat, Dallas County Criminal District Court Judge Nancy Mulder ran as a Democrat against Republican Gina Parker, a criminal defense attorney and former prosecutor. Dallas County Criminal District Court Judge Chika Anyiam, a Democrat who formerly worked as a criminal defense attorney, challenged Republican Lee Finley, a criminal defender, for the Place 8 seat.

Voters chose Republican candidates for all three open seats in the November 2024 general election. Schenck defeated Taylor with 58.3% of votes for the presiding judgeship, Parker defeated Mulder with 58.4% of votes for the Place 7 seat, and Finley defeated Anyiam with 59% of votes for the Place 8 seat. Each judge may serve on the court at least until the expiration of their terms in 2031.

The ouster of the three longtime incumbent judges may help reshape the state's highest criminal court. The judges were defeated in their Republican primary by candidates who were recruited and endorsed by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, who has vowed to defeat judges who joined a 2021 opinion that stripped his office of the authority to pursue alleged election fraud cases and caused many cases that had been pursued by his office to be dismissed. Paxton's handpicked candidates — Schenck, Parker, and Finley — defeated the incumbent judges in the Republican primary and have now won six-year terms on the court. Two more judges who ruled against Paxton's office are up for reelection in 2026, and if Paxton can repeat his feat, his handpicked judges will comprise a majority of the state's highest criminal court.

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## Utah

The seven justices of the Utah Supreme Court are selected using the assisted appointment method, with a judicial nominating commission providing a list of candidates from which the governor chooses a finalist. To fill the remainder of the term, justices must stand for retention election after serving on the court for at least one year and must run in retention elections to serve additional eight-year terms on the court.

In 2024, Associate Justice Matthew Durrant stood for retention election to a fifth eight-year term on the court. Durrant, who was appointed to the court in 2000 by Gov. Michael Leavitt (R), was previously a trial judge in the Third Judicial District and worked in private practice before becoming a judge. In the November 2024 election, Durrant was retained by 77.5% of voters. He may remain on the court until he reaches the state's mandatory retirement age of 75 in 2032.

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## Washington

Washington's supreme court justices are chosen in nonpartisan elections. The terms of three justices would be in 2025. Justice Steven Gonzalez and Justice Sheryl McCloud sought reelection and were unopposed in the general election. Due to Justice Susan Owens reaching the mandatory retirement age, there was an open contest for her seat.

Two of the justices up for election ran unopposed. Justice Stephen Gonzalez and Justice Sheryl McCloud won re-election to the court with 97.64% and (97.48% of the vote, respectively. In the closely contested election for Place 2 on the court, Sal Mungia won election over Dave Larson with just 50.05% of the vote.

Gonzalez previously served as trial judge in King County and worked as assistant U.S. attorney for the Western District of Washington, as a domestic violence prosecutor for Seattle, and as a private practitioner. Before joining the bench, McCloud worked as a public defender and in private practice. Mungia worked in private practice, and his opponent served as a Federal Way Municipal Court judge and worked in private practice.

Similar to some other states with nonpartisan elections, candidates may still be endorsed by partisan leaning groups. Mungia gained endorsements across the Democratic Party while Larson secured the state Republican Party's endorsement.



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## West Virginia

West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals justices are elected in nonpartisan elections. In the case of an unexpected vacancy, the governor selects a nominee from a slate provided by the judicial nominating commission. Those justices serve until the next general election and run for election to remain on the court.

Incumbent Justice Haley Bunn won an uncontested re-election to the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals with 100% of the vote. For the open seat on the court, Republican state lawmaker Charles Trump ran unopposed and won with 100% of the vote.

Before the supreme court, Bunn worked in private practice and as assistant U.S. attorney for the Southern District of West Virginia.

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## Wyoming

Wyoming's five supreme court justices are chosen using the assisted appointment method, with the governor choosing a finalist from a list of candidates recommended by a judicial nominating commission. Justices serve on the court for at least one year before standing for retention election to fill the remainder of the term and then standing for retention election to serve additional eight-year terms.

Two justices with terms expiring in 2025 ran for retention election to new eight-year terms on the court in 2024. Chief Justice Kate Fox was appointed in 2014 by Gov. Matthew Mead (R) and became the court's chief justice in 2021. She worked in private practice prior to joining the bench. Associate Justice John Fenn, appointed to the court in 2021 by Gov. Mark Gordon (R), was previously a Fourth Judicial District Court judge and worked in private practice in construction law, insurance defense, and personal injury matters before becoming a judge. In the November 2024 general election, 78.5% of voters retained Fox and 77.7% retained Fenn. Fox must retire from the court upon reaching the state's mandatory retirement age of seventy later this year, while Fenn may remain on the court until his 70th birthday in 2032.

# STATE SUPREME COURT APPOINTMENTS IN 2024

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Twenty-two vacancies occurred on supreme courts in fourteen states with appointment processes in 2024. Four of these vacancies were due to the elevation of associate justices on several courts to serve as their court's chief justice.

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## Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court

Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healy (D) appointed Elizabeth Dewar to the state Supreme Judicial Court in late 2023. Dewar took office in February 2024 following the retirement of Justice Elspeth Cypher. Dewar spent time as a civil rights advocate before going into private practice focusing on appellate litigation. She then joined the attorney general's office after being nominated as second state solicitor. In early February 2024, Healey nominated Massachusetts Court of Appeals Justice Gabrielle Wolohojian to the Supreme Judicial Court to replace Justice David Lowy after he reached the mandatory retirement age. Prior to her appointment to the court, Wolohojian spent the majority of her career in private practice and briefly left to assist with the Whitewater investigation. Wolohojian's nomination was controversial because Healey and Wolohojian were previously romantic partners. Healey attempted to assuage any skepticism over their past relationship by insisting Wolohojian had the full support of the judicial nominating commission. However, Healey had appointed all the commission members in the previous year. Due to their relationship, Wolohojian faced concerns over her objectivity in cases involving Healey from one Governor's Council member. Ultimately, the Governor's Council confirmed Wolohojian to the bench.

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## Wyoming Supreme Court

Republican Gov. Mark Gordon appointed Cheyenne attorney Robert Jarosh to fill retiring Justice Keith Kautz's seat on the Wyoming Supreme Court. Jarosh spent his career in private practice in Wyoming working on a range of issues such as employer-side employment law, commercial litigation, liability, and civil litigation. To remain on the bench, Jarosh must stand for retention election in 2026.

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## Minnesota Supreme Court

Gov. Tim Walz (D) appointed Court of Appeals Judge Theodora Gaïtas and Stearns County Chief Judge Sarah Hennesy to fill two vacancies on the Minnesota Supreme Court, giving women a majority on that court for the third time since Minnesota became the first state to have a female majority on its high court in 1991. Gaïtas was appointed to fill retiring Justice Margaret Chutich's seat. Hennesy replaced retiring Justice G. Barry Anderson. The appointments are Walz's third and fourth picks to the court. Gaïtas and Hennesy both bring extensive backgrounds in public interest law to the state's highest court. Gaïtas spent nearly two decades as a public defender before entering private practice. She was appointed to the district court by Gov. Mark Dayton (D) in 2013 and remained there until her appointment to the court of appeals in 2020 by Walz. Hennesy spent a decade of her career as a public defender and later returned to public interest practice, providing representation to low-income residents. Hennesy was appointed to the district court bench by Gov. Dayton in 2012. To remain on the bench, Gaïtas and Hennesy must stand for nonpartisan election in 2026.

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## Maryland Supreme Court

Maryland Gov. Wes Moore (D) appointed Prince George's County Circuit Court Judge Peter Killough to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court of Maryland left by the retirement of Judge Michele Hotten, who reached the state's mandatory retirement age of 70 in April of 2024. Killough has been a circuit court judge since 2018. He previously worked in the Office of the Maryland Attorney General, first as a counsel advocating for insurance consumers in the People's Insurance Counsel Division and later investigating and prosecuting allegations of fraud, abuse, and neglect of vulnerable adults as director of the Maryland Medicaid Fraud Unit. He also worked in the Office of the General Counsel for the Ford Motor Company. Killough's term will expire on December 31, 2026, and he will be required to stand for retention election in November 2026 to continue serving on the court.

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## South Carolina Supreme Court

To fill the vacancy left by Chief Justice Donald Beatty's retirement, the South Carolina legislature elected Judge Letitia Verdin. Verdin started her career as an assistant solicitor in the Office of the 13th Circuit Solicitor and then in the 8th Circuit Solicitor, focused on family law and juvenile cases. Verdin briefly went into private practice before returning to the Office of the 13th Solicitor to prosecute child abuse and neglect and domestic violence cases. With Verdin's election, the state supreme court finally gained a female justice, but it came at the cost of losing racial diversity in a state with over a 25% of Black residents. The court's all-male conservative majority came under scrutiny after it upheld the state's near total ban on abortion. The court, when female Justice Kaye Hearn served on the court, had previously delivered a decision striking a nearly identical ban down just months prior to reversing themselves.

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## Louisiana

On July 18, 2024, the University of Louisiana Board of Supervisors announced it had unanimously chosen Louisiana Supreme Court Justice James Genovese to become the next president of Northwestern State University. Genovese was first elected to a ten-year term on the Louisiana Supreme Court in 2017 and represented Louisiana's third judicial district. He resigned from the court to accept the university presidency. Louisiana is the only state in which voters fill midterm vacancies on their state supreme court, and a special election to replace Genovese was scheduled for May 3, 2025, with a primary scheduled for March 29. Following the expiration of the filing period on January 31, in which only one candidate filed to run in the special election, the primary and general elections were canceled. Cade Cole, who has worked as Louisiana's part-time state and local tax judge for over 10 years, will become the court's next justice representing the third judicial district. Cole rules on tax disputes and is one of three members of the Board of State Tax Appeals. He filed to run in the uncontested special election as a Republican. He will become the youngest member of the court, at 42. He may serve until the expiration of the term to which he was appointed in 2026, when he intends to seek a full 10-year term on the court.

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## Tennessee Supreme Court

Gov. Bill Lee (R) nominated then-Judge Mary Wagner to replace Justice Roger Page following his retirement in August 2024. Wagner received bipartisan support in her confirmation by the Tennessee General Assembly. Prior to her elevation to the supreme court, Wagner served as judge on the Shelby County Circuit Court. She previously worked in private practice focusing on general civil litigation and taught at the Cecil Humphreys School of Law at the University of Memphis. She also worked at an insurance defense firm. Wagner is a self-described originalist and textualist.

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## New Jersey Supreme Court

Gov. Phil Murphy (D) announced John Jay Hoffman as his next nominee to the New Jersey Supreme Court following the retirement of Justice Lee Solomon, who reached the state's mandatory retirement age of 70 in August of 2024. Hoffman is a former acting attorney general who worked under the Christie administration from 2013 to 2016. By nominating Hoffman, Murphy maintains the state tradition of maintaining a partisan balance on the bench. The New Jersey Senate confirmed Hoffman, and he became Murphy's fifth appointment to the state's supreme court.

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## Nebraska Supreme Court

Gov. Jim Pillen (R) has appointed Justice Jeffrey Funke as the state's next chief justice of the Nebraska Supreme Court, replacing retiring Chief Justice Mike Heavican. To fill the vacancy created by Funke's elevation, Pillen selected Fifth Judicial District Court Judge and former career prosecutor Jason Bergevin to serve as the supreme court justice representing the state's fifth judicial district. Bergevin was chosen on January 2, 2025, from a list of three finalists recommended by the fifth District Judicial Nominating Commission. Both Funke and Bergevin must stand for retention in the 2028 election to remain on the court.

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## Arkansas Supreme Court

In the 2024 general election, Karen Baker, an associate justice of the Arkansas Supreme Court, was elected in a runoff election to serve as the court's next chief justice. Her elevation made her the first woman to lead the court, creating a vacancy in the Position 6 seat she had previously held. Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders (R) appointed the state's solicitor general, Nicholas Bronni, to fill the vacancy in Position 6 created by Baker's elevation. Another of the court's associate justices, Courtney Hudson, had served in Position 3 since 2010. In 2024, Hudson decided to run for the open Position 2 seat because, due to the staggered term limits of the court's seven seats, the move will allow her to serve four more years on the court before she is stripped of her retirement benefits in 2046. Arkansas has no mandatory retirement age for judges but does not allow judges to collect retirement benefits if they run for election to additional terms past the age of seventy. If Hudson had remained in Position 3, she would have faced this outcome in 2042. Hudson won the Position 2 seat in a March 2024 primary election and vacated her Position 3 seat at the end of 2024. Sanders nominated Cody Hiland to fill the vacancy in the Position 3 seat previously held by Hudson. Prior to his appointment, Hiland had served on the Arkansas Supreme Court in the Position 2 seat. Sanders appointed him to fill a vacancy in that position in July of 2023 but was prevented from running for the seat by the Arkansas Constitution, which bars justices from running for election to a seat to which they were previously appointed. With Hiland's appointment to a second seat on the court in as many years, he and Hudson have switched seats on the court. Both Bronni and Hiland may remain in their seats until 2026, when both seats will be on the ballot as open races. At a press conference announcing the appointments, Sanders bragged that her handpicked justices had flipped the partisan control of the court, saying, "When I came into office nearly two years ago, we had a liberal supreme court. Not anymore. Our supreme court is now solidly conservative."

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## Texas Supreme Court

Nathan Hecht, the longtime chief justice of the Texas Supreme Court, was required to retire from the court by the end of 2024 after reaching the state's mandatory retirement age earlier in the year. On January 6, 2025, Gov. Greg Abbott (R) announced he would elevate Associate Justice Jimmy Blacklock to the position of chief justice. Blacklock was first appointed to the court by Abbott in 2018 and previously served as Abbott's general counsel and in the Office of the Texas Attorney General. Abbott also announced he would appoint his general counsel, James Sullivan, to fill the vacancy in the Place 2 seat that was created by Blacklock's elevation. Sullivan was previously Abbott's deputy counsel and the solicitor general of Texas. He will stand for partisan election in 2026 to fill the remainder of the Place 2 term ending in 2031.

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## Alaska Supreme Court

The former chief justice of the Alaska Supreme Court, Peter Maasen, retired from the court in January of 2025. The court's justices selected their fellow justice, Susan Carney, to serve as the court's next chief justice. Chief justices serve three-year terms. Following a selection process in which several candidates were interviewed, the state's judicial nominating commission forwarded three finalists to Gov. Mike Dunleavy (R). On December 2, 2024, Dunleavy chose Aimee Anderson Oravec to become the court's next associate justice. Oravec had previously served as the lead attorney for Doyon Utilities, part of Doyon, Limited, which is one of the 13 Alaska Native Regional Corporations. She previously worked in private practice for 15 years as a litigator and employment law attorney, representing corporations and nonprofit organizations. She also previously served as one of the three attorney members of the Alaska Judicial Council. With Oravec's appointment, three of the court's five members will be women for the first time in its history. She may remain on the court until the expiration of the term she was appointed to fill in 2029 and may run for a full 10-year term on the court in 2028.



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## Connecticut Supreme Court

Former Connecticut Supreme Court Chief Justice Richard Robinson retired from the court in September of 2024, and Gov. Ned Lamont (D) appointed Associate Justice Rahim Mullins to become the court's next chief justice. Mullins had been an associate justice since his appointment to the court by Gov. Dannel Malloy (D) in 2017. He was previously an appellate court and superior court judge and served as an assistant attorney general in the child protection division before becoming a judge. On January 24, 2025, Gov. Ned Lamont (D) selected appellate court Judge William H. Bright, Jr. to fill the vacancy created by Justice Raheem Mullins' elevation to chief justice in the fall of 2024. Bright, a career corporate litigator who will join a bench already dominated by former prosecutors and corporate litigators, will bring neither professional nor demographic diversity to Connecticut's highest court. Mullins succeeded Richard Robinson, the first Black man to serve as the court's chief justice. Mullins is also a Black man, but with his seat being filled by Bright — who is white — the new chief justice will be the only person of color serving on the court. Both Mullins and Bright were confirmed to the court by the state legislature in 2025.

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## Arizona Supreme Court

Former Arizona Supreme Court Justice Robert Brutinel announced he would retire from the state's highest court on October 31, 2024. The state's judicial nominating commission interviewed eight of the seventeen candidates who applied for consideration to fill the vacancy and recommended five finalists to Gov. Katie Hobbs (D). On January 29, 2025, Hobbs appointed Arizona Court of Appeals Judge Maria Elena Cruz to fill the vacancy left by Brutinel's retirement. Cruz previously served as judge pro-tem for the Cocopah Indian Tribe and worked as a criminal defense and family law attorney and as a Yuma County prosecutor. She must stand for retention in the November 2026 general election to continue serving on the court. She is Hobbs' first appointment to the seven-member court and is the first Black justice and the first Latina to join the state's highest court.

# ETHICS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

State supreme courts across the nation are vested with the power to determine disciplinary measures for the attorneys and judges who violate ethics codes and canons in their states. Systems can vary from state to state, with some supreme courts considering recommendations from judicial ethics commissions or other oversight bodies. Such issues can become complicated when the conduct being considered by members of these same courts committed state high courts. Systems in some states require supreme court justices to deliver sanctions to their own colleagues, despite a recommendation from the American Bar Association's Model Rules for Judicial Disciplinary Enforcement, which recognizes that state supreme courts that are empowered to discipline their own members can contribute to appearances of potential impropriety and conflicts of interest. These rules are in place to ensure that the public can have confidence in the integrity of judicial proceedings and that misconduct by supreme court justices will be addressed by impartial decision makers.

## New Hampshire

New Hampshire Supreme Court Justice Anna Barbara Hantz Marconi was indicted by a grand jury in October of 2024 on two felony and five misdemeanor charges related to her alleged attempt to influence a criminal investigation into her husband, Geno Marconi, the director of the Division of Ports and Harbors in the Pease Development Authority. Marconi had been on administrative leave from his position since April 2024, when he came under investigation for allegedly retaliating against a member of the Pease Development Authority's board of directors. That month, Hantz Marconi contacted Steve Duprey, who was appointed by New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu (R) to serve as the board chair for the Pease Development Authority, to convey the difficulty the investigation into her husband's conduct had created for her family. Two months later, Hantz Marconi met with Sununu — who had appointed her to the state's highest court in 2017 — and told him that the investigation into her husband was creating a burden on other members of the court because she was being required to recuse herself from a number of cases involving the state's attorney general, whose office was leading the investigation into her husband.

Sununu contacted the supreme court's chief justice, Gordon MacDonald, to confirm Hantz Marconi's assertion that the investigation was hindering the court's ability to hear cases, which MacDonald disputed. The attorney general's office launched an investigation into Hantz Marconi's conduct, interviewing Duprey and Sununu about the content of their meetings with her. In July, Hantz Marconi was asked by the supreme court to take a 90-day leave of absence from the court pending the outcome of the investigation. Her husband was indicted in October on allegations that he retaliated against Neil Levesque, the member of the Pease Development Authority's board of directors, by sharing Levesque's confidential motor vehicle records. A few weeks later, Hantz Marconi was indicted on two felony charges: attempt to commit improper influence and criminal solicitation of improper influence; and five misdemeanors: criminal solicitation of official oppression, official oppression, obstructing government administration, and two counts of criminal solicitation of misuse of position. Her leave of absence from the court was extended indefinitely and her law license was suspended pending the outcome of her criminal trial.

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Hantz Marconi remains on administrative leave from the New Hampshire Supreme Court. She has not given any indication that she intends to leave the court, and the only way that she can be removed is if she is investigated and impeached by the state House and convicted by the state Senate. Leaders of both legislative bodies have indicated they do not plan to take any action on Hantz Marconi's ongoing suspension prior to the resolution of the criminal charges against her. Superior court judges have been filling in for her during her absence from the court. Sununu left office in January of 2025, and if she ultimately resigns or is forced to leave the court, Sununu's successor, Gov. Kelly Ayotte (R), will appoint Hantz Marconi's replacement, whose confirmation by the State Executive Council will be required.

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## Maine

An ongoing ethics scandal continues to plague the Maine Supreme Judicial Court involving one of its associate justices, Catherine Connors. Before joining the state's highest court in 2020, Connors spent her legal career representing banks and banking interests as a complex corporate litigator. During her confirmation hearings before the legislature's judiciary committee in 2020, Connors was repeatedly asked about what she might do in the event of possible conflicts of interest. Connors answered that she expected there would be numerous scenarios in which she would need to recuse herself from hearing certain cases, especially appeals of foreclosures. Connors assured legislators that if any doubt arose concerning the appropriateness of hearing a case, she would "err on the side of recusal."

In early 2024, the Maine Supreme Court released two opinions that overturned important precedents it had set in two cases the court heard in 2017: *Pushard v. Bank of America* and *Federal National Mortgage Association v. Deschaine*. In Pushard and Deschaine, the court held that foreclosure actions in which lenders failed to meet legal requirements for notices of default are unenforceable and that banks may not bring multiple foreclosure actions against the same homeowners. The rulings dramatically reshaped the landscape of foreclosure law in Maine by introducing a new regulatory scheme in which lenders that do not adhere to the letter of the law in every step of a foreclosure action lose the right to pursue those actions in the future. The new system increased protections for struggling homeowners by requiring banks to ensure borrowers are aware of their default status and impending foreclosure during each step of the process. But the opinions the court delivered in the 2024 cases — *J.P. Morgan Mortgage Acquisition Corp. v. Moulton* and *Finch v. U.S. Bank* — overturned the precedents set in Pushard and Deschaine, eliminating these important protections for homeowners. Connors joined the majority in both Moulton and Finch. In 2017, Connors represented Bank of America in the Pushard case, which she lost before the Maine Supreme Court. In 2024, Pierce Atwood, the firm where Connors was formerly a partner, submitted an amicus brief that urged the court to overturn the precedent set in Pushard and Deschaine.

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Following the release of the opinions in *Moulton* and *Finch*, longtime Maine foreclosure attorney Thomas Cox filed a complaint against Connors with Maine's Committee on Judicial Conduct that alleged Connors had a conflict of interest and should have recused herself from participating in the court's decisions. The state's code of judicial conduct requires judges to recuse themselves if their ability to remain impartial might be reasonably questioned. After an investigation lasting several months, the commission found that Connors had violated the Maine Code of Judicial Conduct, noting specifically that she had not adhered to the assurances she made during her confirmation hearings that she would recuse herself in cases before the court involving banks and foreclosures.

In Maine, the responsibility of disciplining lawyers and judges who are found to have violated ethics or conduct rules falls to the state's highest court, so the committee referred its findings to the Maine Supreme Judicial Court to determine how they should be addressed. But the court sent the report back to the commission with instructions for the commission to reach a conclusion about which specific punishment, if any, Connors should receive. The commission then recommended that she receive sanctions, and, due to the unprecedented nature of the finding of misconduct against a supreme court justice, the committee recommended that further actions be considered by a panel of judges of the Maine Superior Court or from other states, rather than by the Maine Supreme Judicial Court itself. In response, the court has proposed a new system for disciplining all state judges, including its own members. Under the new system, disciplinary authority would be transferred to an independent panel composed of superior court and district court judges. The court sought public comment on the proposed changes and is now considering implementing them. If the changes are adopted, it is not clear how or if they would impact the findings against Justice Connor by the Committee on Judicial Conduct. Connors has requested that her fellow justices decide how she will be disciplined.

# NOTABLE STATE SUPREME COURT CASES IN 2024

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## IMPORTANT STATE SUPREME COURT DECISIONS FROM 2024

### BALLOT ACCESS

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#### Arizona

*Living United for Change in Arizona, et al. v. Fontes, et al.*

In a unanimous ruling, the Arizona Supreme Court rejected a challenge to a ballot proposal intended to strengthen measures to prevent people from crossing into Arizona from Mexico.

#### Arkansas

*Cowles v. Thurston*

In a 4–3 opinion, the Arkansas Supreme Court upheld a ruling from state elections officials that found a group collecting signatures for a citizen initiative to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution improperly submitted documents pertaining to its paid signature gathering effort in violation of state election laws.

#### Michigan

*Mothering Justice v. Attorney General*

In a 4–3 ruling, the Michigan Supreme Court found that Republican lawmakers violated the rights of voters when they adopted a citizen-initiated ballot proposal to overhaul the state's minimum wage, tipped wage, and sick leave policies and made major changes to the proposal through the state's "adopt-and-amend" legislative practice.

#### New York

*Byrnes v. Senate of the State of New York*

The New York Court of Appeals affirmed a lower court ruling that dismissed a challenge to a proposed constitutional amendment aimed at banning discrimination based on gender, gender identity, age, sex, national origin, disability, ethnicity, gender expression, pregnancy, and other protected classes.

#### Ohio

*The State ex rel. Citizens Not Politicians, et al. v. Ohio Ballot Board, et al.*

In a 4–3 ruling, the Ohio Supreme Court approved controversial language proposed by the secretary of state to describe a ballot proposal, which supporters claimed was a patently false misrepresentation of the proposal's effect and was intended to mislead voters.

# CONSUMERS

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## Ohio

*Berkheimer v. REKM LLC*

In a 4–3 decision, the Ohio Supreme Court ruled that a patron could not bring a negligence cause of action against a restaurant that served him chicken advertised and sold as “boneless wings,” which nonetheless contained a piece of bone that punctured the man’s esophagus and caused an infection that required surgery to treat.

# CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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## Iowa

*State of Iowa v. White*

In a 4–3 ruling, the Iowa Supreme Court ruled that the state’s constitution prohibits virtual testimony in criminal trials, which will now require child victims testifying against their abusers to testify in person.

## Massachusetts

*Commonwealth v. Mattis*

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court issued a historic opinion ruling that sentences of life without the possibility of parole are unconstitutional for people under the age of twenty-one. Massachusetts is the first state to extend this protection to young adults.

## New Jersey

*State v. Washington*

In a unanimous opinion, the New Jersey Supreme Court issued an unprecedented new rule directing prosecutors not to show a defendant’s photo to any witness during trial preparation who has made a prior identification. In doing so, they ordered a lower court to determine if a man convicted of attempted manslaughter using witness identifications and circumstantial evidence should be retried due to a possible violation of his due process rights.

# DEATH PENALTY

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## Alabama

*In re: Kenneth Eugene Smith v. State of Alabama*

In a 6–2 order, the Alabama Supreme Court granted the state permission to move forward with a novel execution method called “nitrogen hypoxia” in the execution of someone sentenced to death who previously survived an effort by the state to execute him using an excruciating cut-down procedure during an attempted lethal injection.

# EDUCATION

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## Oklahoma

*Independent School District No. 12 v. Stat*

The Oklahoma Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the state department of education does not have the authority to force local schools to change the books in their library.

*Drummond v. Oklahoma Statewide Virtual Charter School Board*

In a 6–2 opinion, the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled that a proposed Catholic charter school, which would be funded with public education dollars, was a violation of the U.S. Constitution, the Oklahoma Constitution, and several state statutes.

## South Carolina

*Eidson v. South Carolina Department of Education*

In a 3–2 opinion, the South Carolina Supreme Court ruled that a private school voucher law, which allowed parents to spend public tax dollars earmarked for public education on private school tuition, violates the state’s constitution.

# ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTIONS

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## Montana

*Held v. Montana*

The Montana Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling that found that the state had violated the constitutional rights of the state’s children to live in a healthy environment through its support of the fossil fuel industry. The case was the first climate-related constitutional case to go to trial in the country, and the decision will require the state to overhaul its energy policy to consider the rights of the state’s children.



# EXECUTIVE POWER & CIVIL LIBERTIES

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## Massachusetts

*Six Brothers, Inc. v. Town of Brookline*

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court upheld the authority of communities and municipalities to enact their own regulations on the sale or distribution of products they deem harmful to their residents or visitors.

## Missouri

*Byrd, et al. v. State of Missouri, et al.*

The Missouri Supreme Court ruled that a provision in a new state law, which bans sleeping on public land and restricts state funding for permanent supportive housing, is unconstitutional.

# GUN SAFETY

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## Hawaii

*State of Hawai'i v. Wilson*

In a unanimous opinion, the Hawaii Supreme Court upheld a state law prohibiting the carrying of firearms in public without a license, ruling that the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution allows states to require individuals carrying firearms in public to be licensed.

## Nevada

*Sisolak v. Polymer80, Inc.*

The Nevada Supreme Court overturned a lower court's ruling that struck down a 2021 law that placed a statewide ban on the sale of "ghost guns", which are components of firearms that have no serial numbers and allow buyers to assemble their own firearms that are unregulated and untraceable.

# LGBTQ+ AMERICANS

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## Montana

*Van Garderen, et al. v. Montana*

The Montana Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling that blocked a state law banning gender-affirming health care for minors. The decision will allow minors to receive care while the challenge to the law is heard in a lower court.

## Texas

*Texas v. Loe*

In an 8–1 ruling, the Texas Supreme Court upheld the state's law banning gender affirming care for transgender children. Approximately 29,000 Texas children aged 13–17 who identify as transgender will lose access to gender affirming care because of the ruling.

# RACIAL EQUITY

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## Oklahoma

*Randle v. City of Tulsa*

The Oklahoma Supreme Court dismissed a lawsuit that sought reparations in response to the 1921 Tulsa race massacre, when a white mob murdered three hundred Black Tulsans and razed their neighborhood, Greenwood — also known as Black Wall Street.

# REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

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## Arizona

*Planned Parenthood Arizona, et al. v. Mayes, et al.*

In a 4–2 decision, the Arizona Supreme Court issued a ruling that allowed a near-total ban on abortion that was enacted in 1864 to go into effect. Voters passed a statewide ballot initiative in November 2024 that enshrines reproductive rights in the state constitution, superseding the ban.

## Kansas

*Hodes & Nauser, MDS, P.A. v. Kobach, Hodes & Nauser, MDS, P.A. v. Stanek*

The Kansas Supreme Court affirmed that the right to an abortion is enshrined in the state's constitution in two rulings that blocked the enforcement of a law prohibiting second-trimester abortion procedures and a 2015 law that attempted to change licensing requirements for clinics that provide abortions.

## Montana

*Planned Parenthood v. State*

The Montana Supreme Court ruled that a 2013 law prohibiting minors from obtaining abortion care without parental consent is unconstitutional.

## Pennsylvania

*Allegheny Reproductive Health Center, et. al v. Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, et. al*

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court issued an opinion that found a right to abortion in the commonwealth's constitution and ordered a lower court to reconsider whether a law that prevents Medicaid from covering abortion care is unconstitutional.

## Texas

*Zurawski v. Texas*

The Texas Supreme Court rejected a challenge to the state's abortion ban that had asked the court to clarify the circumstances in which it is legal for doctors in Texas to perform abortions to save the life or health of the pregnant person.

# VOTING RIGHTS

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## Delaware

*Albence v. Mennella*

In a unanimous ruling, the Delaware Supreme Court reversed a lower court ruling that found absentee voting laws unconstitutional. The ruling made absentee and early voting available to voters in the 2024 general election.

## Idaho

*Babe Vote and League of Women Voters of Idaho v. McGrane*

In a unanimous ruling, the Idaho Supreme Court dismissed a challenge to two voter identification laws passed in 2023 that restricted voting rights for students while expanding those rights for individuals holding specific IDs, such as hunting licenses. The court's ruling will allow the laws to remain in effect.

## Kansas

*League of Women Voters of Kansas v. Schwab*

In a 4–3 opinion, the Kansas Supreme Court ruled that the state's constitution does not explicitly protect the right to vote in a decision that reinstated a measure requiring election officials to match signatures on mail ballots to those on voters' registration records.

## Minnesota

*Minnesota Voters Alliance v. Hunt*

The Minnesota Supreme Court upheld a 2023 state law that restored voting rights to people with felony convictions. The ruling made approximately 55,000 people eligible to vote in the November 2024 election.

## Montana

*Montana Democratic Party, et al. v. Jacobsen*

The Montana Supreme Court overturned four recently enacted election administration statutory provisions, ruling that the laws disparately impacted young, Native American, and disabled voters in violation of the state constitution's voting rights protections.

## Pennsylvania

*Black Political Empowerment Project, et al. v. Schmidt, et al.*

In a 4–3 decision, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court overturned a lower court ruling that ordered county election officials to count mail-in ballots with missing or incorrect dates on outer return envelopes.

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## Utah

### *League of Women Voters v. Utah State Legislature*

In a unanimous opinion, the Utah Supreme Court ordered a lower court to reexamine the state's redistricting process, ruling that a law enacted by the state legislature in 2021, which stripped power from the state's independent, citizen-led redistricting commission, violated the state's constitution.

## Wisconsin

### *Clarke v. Wisconsin Election Commission*

The Wisconsin Supreme Court issued a decision ordering the state legislature to draw new apportionment maps for its state Assembly and Senate districts. The ruling required candidates for all the state's Assembly seats and half of its Senate seats to run in 2024.

### *Priorities USA v. Wisconsin Elections Commission*

In a 4–3 partisan ruling, the court overturned its previous decision prohibiting the use of ballot drop boxes, reinstating the ability of election clerks to use drop boxes across the state in this past fall's elections.

## WORKERS

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## Arizona

### *Gilmore, et al. v. Gallego, et al.*

In a unanimous ruling, the Arizona Supreme Court ruled that the city of Phoenix violated the state constitution's gifts clause when it paid city employees for release time to conduct union business during work hours, a standard practice found in collective bargaining agreements across the country.

## Minnesota

### *Alonzo v. Menholt Farms, Inc.*

The Minnesota Supreme Court ruled that plaintiffs may file claims against entities that negligently hire workers as independent contractors, recognizing a novel common law tort action in Minnesota.

# IMPORTANT STATE SUPREME COURT DECISIONS PENDING IN 2025

## ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

### Hawaii

*Nitta v. Hawaii Medical Services Association*

The Hawaii Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in a case brought by a doctor against the state's largest health insurer after its refusal to cover treatments he ordered caused grave effects for several of his patients. The court's decision could improve health care delivery in the state.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE

### Washington

*In re: Indigent Defense Standards*

The Washington Supreme Court held a hearing to address a proposed overhaul of the state's indigent defense standards as part of an effort to address a crisis arising from a shortage of public defenders in the state, which is threatening the Fourth Amendment rights of indigent defendants.

## DEATH PENALTY

### Florida

*Jackson v. Florida*

The Florida Supreme Courts heard oral arguments in a case challenging the constitutionality of a 2023 state law that allows non-unanimous juries to deliver death sentences.

## EDUCATION

### New Hampshire

*Rand et al. v. State of New Hampshire*

The New Hampshire Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a petition asserting that a 2011 law that allows wealthy municipalities to keep excess property tax revenue rather than allocating it to the state for redistribution to less affluent communities is unconstitutional.

# ENVIRONMENT

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## Wisconsin

*Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, Inc. v. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources*

The Wisconsin Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a case that will determine if the state's department of natural resources has the authority to require polluters to clean up toxic chemical spills.

# FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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## Minnesota

*Energy Transfer LP, et al. v. Greenpeace International, et al.*

An energy company asked the Minnesota Supreme Court to order independent journalists to turn over information gathered during their coverage of a protest, arguing that a state law that protects journalists' sources is not applicable because the information was allegedly gathered while the journalists were trespassing.

# GUN SAFETY

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## Ohio

*State v. Striblin*

The Ohio Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in a case that could overturn a law prohibiting people from carrying a concealed weapon while consuming alcohol in a bar.

# LGBTQ+

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## Minnesota

*Cooper v. USA Powerlifting*

The Minnesota Supreme Court will hear a case brought by a trans athlete who sued a powerlifting association, citing discrimination in violation of the Minnesota Human Rights Act, after it denied her the opportunity to compete in the women's division.

# REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

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## South Dakota

*Access Independent Health Services, Inc., et al. v. Wrigley, et al.*

The South Dakota Supreme Court heard oral arguments in an appeal brought by the state after a judge overturned a 2023 state law that criminalized most abortions, ruling that it violates the state constitution. The law will not be enforced while the court considers the appeal.

## Wisconsin

*Kaul v. Urmanski*

The Wisconsin Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a district attorney's appeal of a district court ruling that overturned a Wisconsin law enacted in 1849 that was intended to criminalize feticide, but which has been interpreted as an abortion ban.

## Wyoming

*State of Wyoming, et al. v. Johnson, et al.*

The Wyoming Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in an appeal brought by state officials against a permanent injunction placed on a recently enacted abortion ban by a district court judge, who ruled that the ban violates residents' constitutional rights to make their own health care decisions.

# WORKERS

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## Oregon

*Oregon-Columbia Chapter of the Associated General Contractors of America v. Department of Transportation*

The Oregon Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a case that will determine whether the state can legally enter into project labor agreements.

# VOTING RIGHTS

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## Iowa

*Iowa League of United Latin American Citizens of Iowa v. Pate, et al.*

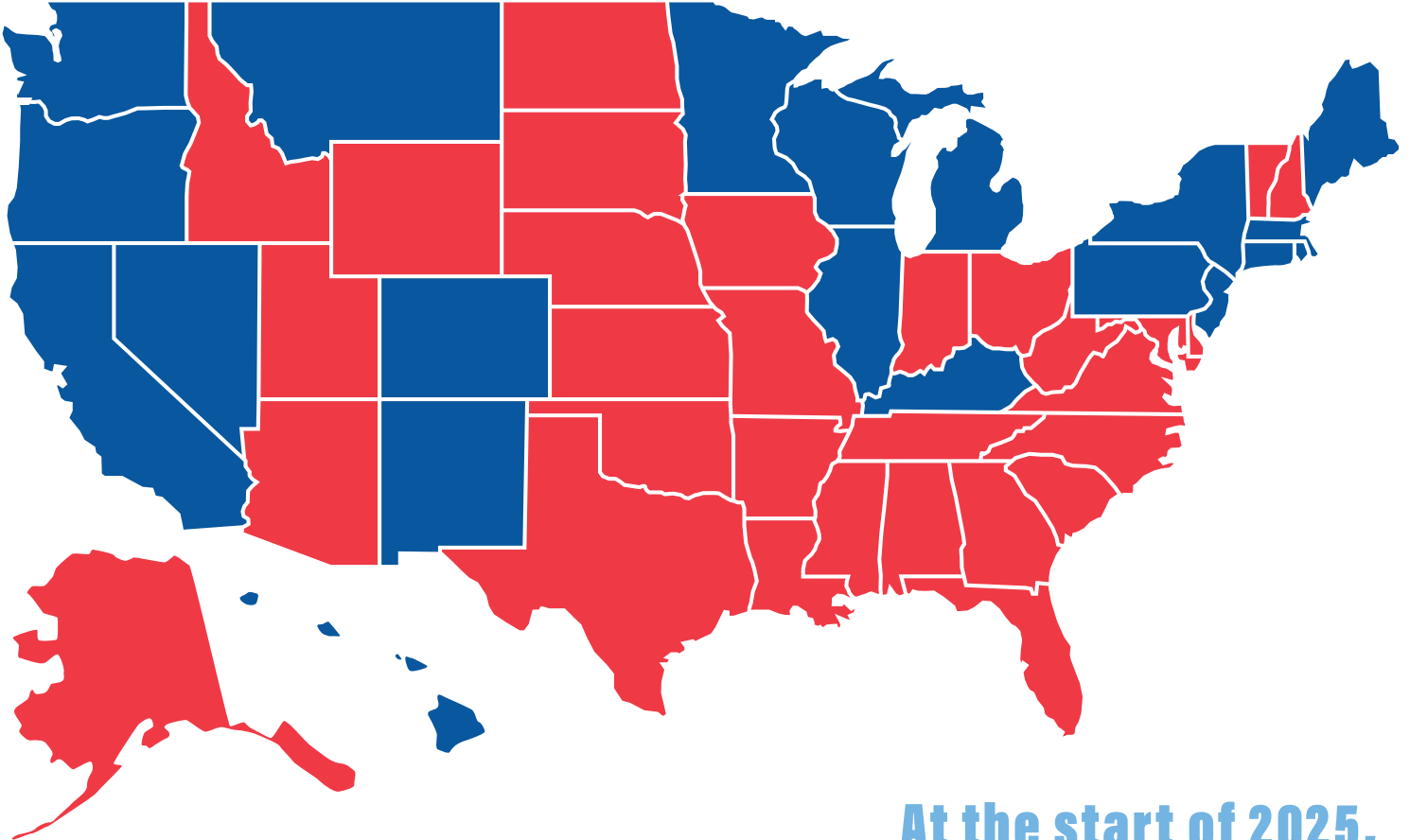
The Iowa Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a case challenging the legality of a state law that prohibits the secretary of state and other elections officials from publishing voting materials in languages other than English.



# STATE SUPREME COURTS IN 2025 & BEYOND

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## MAKEUP AND CONTROL OF STATE SUPREME COURTS



**At the start of 2025,  
Republicans held thirty state supreme courts,  
while Democrats controlled twenty.**

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The following pages contain a summary of the races for four seats in two states in 2025, as well as anticipated vacancies in 11 states. Also included is a brief overview of the 60 seats up for election in 30 states in 2026, as well as anticipated vacancies in two states.

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# 2025 ELECTIONS AND VACANCIES

## ELECTIONS

Two states will hold elections for state supreme court seats in 2025. One state held a nonpartisan election to fill an open seat, and one state will hold retention elections for three seats on its high court.

### Wisconsin

Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Ann Walsh Bradley's current term will expire on July 31, 2025. Bradley first joined the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 1995 and was reelected to the court in 2005 and 2015. In April of 2024, Bradley announced she would retire from the court upon the expiration of her third term. Following the filing deadline on January 7, 2025, two candidates had announced they would run to replace Bradley: Waukesha County Circuit Court Judge Brad Schimel, a Republican former Wisconsin attorney general, and Dane County Circuit Court Judge Susan Crawford, a former assistant attorney general and counsel to former Wisconsin Gov. James Doyle (D).

The race to succeed Bradley quickly became the most expensive state supreme court race in the nation's history, exceeding \$90 million and breaking the record set in 2023 during the campaign for another open seat on the Wisconsin Supreme Court, which saw spending in excess of \$51 million and culminated in a victory for the liberal candidate, Janet Protasiewicz. Since Protasiewicz's victory, liberals have controlled the court for the first time in more than 15 years, and have delivered decisions that have reshaped voting rights, abortion access, and executive authority in the state. The retirement of Bradley, part of the liberal majority, posed a chance for conservatives to reclaim the bench. Outside spending poured into the race, with billionaire Elon Musk spending over \$25 million of his personal fortune attempting to sway voters to support Schimel, his preferred candidate. "If the supreme court is able to redraw the districts, they will gerrymander the district and deprive Wisconsin of two seats on the Republican side. Then they will try to stop all the government reforms we are getting done for you, the American people," he told a crowd of voters at a rally he held in the state the Sunday before the election, where he also gave checks for \$1 million to two members of the audience. Musk and his electric car company, Tesla, are also currently embroiled in a legal battle with the state of Wisconsin, which prohibits vehicle manufacturers from selling their vehicles directly to consumers, instead requiring vehicles to be sold by third-party dealers. Musk is seeking an exemption from the laws so that Tesla can open dealerships throughout Wisconsin.

Crawford cruised to victory over Schimel in the general election on April 1, 2025, with 56.8% of votes to Schimel's 43.2%. Her victory ensures that liberals will control the court until at least July of 2028, when the term currently held by Justice Rebecca Dallet is set to expire. Crawford will be sworn in on August 1, 2025, to a term that will expire on July 31, 2035.

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## Pennsylvania

The terms of three justices of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court will expire on January 4, 2026, and the justices must stand for retention election to remain on the court. Associate Justices Christine Donohue, David Wecht, and Kevin Dougherty will stand for retention election on November 4, 2025. Each of the incumbent justices were first elected to the court as Democrats in 2015. Donohue is a former superior court judge and private practitioner. Wecht is a former court of common pleas judge and private practitioner. Dougherty is a former court of common pleas judge, assistant district attorney, and private practitioner. If retained to the court, Wecht and Dougherty may continue to serve until the expiration of their new ten-year terms in 2035, while Donohue will be required to retire from the court upon reaching the state's mandatory retirement age of 75 in 2027.

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## VACANCIES

As of early 2025, vacancies are open or expected on 11 state supreme courts. Some of these vacancies have already been filled, and appointment processes are underway in others. These numbers could change due to unanticipated resignations, vacancies, or appointments.

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## Georgia Supreme Court

Chief Justice Michael Boggs announced he will retire from the Georgia Supreme Court at the end of the court's current term on March 31, 2025. Boggs joined the court in 2016 after Gov. Nathan Deal (R) appointed him to the bench. The Georgia Judicial Nomination Commission will screen and interview applicants for the vacancy. Then, the commission will send a shortlist of finalists to Gov. Brian Kemp (R). The eventual appointee to the court will be Kemp's fifth appointment to the nine-member court, making his appointees a majority on the court. The next justice will serve the rest of Boggs's term through 2030. To remain on the bench, that justice must run in a non-partisan election in 2030. Since the court's founding in 1845, no appointed incumbent justice has ever lost retention election to the court, meaning the next justice will likely remain on the bench until their retirement.

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## Maine Supreme Judicial Court

Former Maine Supreme Court Justice Joseph Jabar left the state's highest court when his second term expired in January of 2024. Jabar, aged 77 when his second term expired, joined the court after an appointment in 2009 by Gov. John Baldacci (D). Gov. Paul LePage (R) subsequently reappointed Jabar in 2016. Gov. Janet Mills (D) declined to reappoint Jabar to another term on the court, citing a desire to diversify the court, but left the vacancy open for the remainder of 2024. In March 2025, Mills nominated superior court Justice Julia Lipez to fill Jabar's seat. Lipez joined the statewide superior court in 2022. President Biden most recently nominated Lipez as judge on the U.S. First Circuit Court of Appeals, but her nomination did not advance before the 118th Congress adjourned. Before her time as a judge, Lipez served as assistant U.S. attorney for Maine. The Maine Senate confirmed Lipez to the court in a 34-1 vote. Mills officially swore Lipez into office on March 28.

## Oklahoma Supreme Court

On April 14, 2025, Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt (R) announced he would appoint Woodward attorney Travis Jett to fill a seat on the Oklahoma Supreme Court that was vacated when voters removed former Justice Yvonne Kauger from the bench in the November 2024 retention election. Jett previously worked in private practice for several high-profile law firms in Oklahoma City before returning to practice in Woodward. He is also a past president of both the Oklahoma chapter and the national Future Farmers of America. He was associated with a number of conservative political organizations in Oklahoma during his time in private practice, including Build Oklahoma, Inc; Panhandle Political Action Committee; the Yes on 790 Association; and the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, a right-wing think tank that engaged in the effort to oust Kauger and two other liberal justices from the court.

Oklahoma's supreme court justices are selected using the assisted appointment method, in which an appointee is selected by the governor from a slate of finalists selected by the state's 15-member Judicial Nominating Commission. Jett is Stitt's fourth appointment to the state's highest court for civil matters, which has nine members. He was among 13 applicants and three finalists selected by the Judicial Nominating Commission. The other finalists were Donna Dirickson and John Parsley, both district court judges. Despite lauding Jett's career and experience when announcing his choice, Stitt shared during his weekly press briefing the following day that he wants the Judicial Nominating Commission to be eliminated, saying he believes the assisted appointment method limits the ability of the governor to choose their ideal candidate. "To get the very best and brightest, and to be able to get the best pool of people into these different positions, sometimes you have to go recruit them, you have to go make some phone calls. You have to say, 'Hey, I really need you to apply.' And when you have all these restrictions around, it's difficult," Stitt said. Jett must run for retention election to serve a full term on the court in 2026.

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## Michigan Supreme Court

Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Elizabeth Clement announced in February of 2025 that she would retire from the court to become the next president of the National Center for State Courts, a nonprofit organization that researches and promotes accessibility and efficiency of state courts. She was first appointed to the court in 2017 by Gov. Rick Snyder (R) and elected to a full eight-year term on the court in 2018. Her departure provides Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D) with her second opportunity to appoint a justice of her choice to fill a mid-term vacancy following her historic appointment of Kyra Harris Bolden, the first Black woman to serve on the state's highest court, in 2022. In Michigan, mid-term vacancies are filled by the governor, who solicits qualified applicants and chooses an appointee from among the applications. Chief justices are selected by a majority vote of the justices, so Whitmer's appointee will become the court's newest associate justice and will shift the balance of the court to six justices nominated or appointed by Democrats and one justice nominated or appointed by Republicans. Shortly before Clement's retirement, the justices of the court elected Justice Megan Cavanagh to become the next chief justice. Cavanagh was elected to the court in 2018 and must run for re-election in 2026 to remain on the court. Clement retired from the court and Cavanagh commenced her term as chief justice on April 14, 2025. On April 23, 2025, Whitmer announced she would appoint Michigan Court of Appeals Judge Noah Hood to replace Clement. Hood has served on the Michigan Court of Appeals since 2022 and was previously a judge of the Wayne County Circuit Court. Prior to becoming a judge, he worked as an Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan, prosecuting health care fraud and opioid-related offenses, and for the Northern District of Ohio prosecuting public corruption, money laundering, and other white-collar crimes. He may serve on the court until December 31, 2026, and must run in a nonpartisan election in November of 2026 to remain on the court for a full term.

## Wyoming Supreme Court

To replace retiring Chief Justice Kate Fox, Gov. Mark Gordon appointed Attorney General Bridget Hill (R) to the Wyoming Supreme Court. Prior to serving as attorney general, Hill worked at the Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investments. She also worked at the state attorney general's office in different capacities. She began her legal career as staff attorney for former state supreme court justices Michael Golden and Larry Lehman. Fox will officially step down from the court on May 27, and Hill will assume office on May 28. Hill must run for retention election in 2026 to remain on the court.

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## West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals

West Virginia Supreme Court Justice Elizabeth Walker has notified Gov. Patrick Morrissey (R) that she will retire from the court in June of 2025. Walker was first elected to the court in May of 2016, defeating incumbent Justice Brent Benjamin. When she was sworn into her 12-year term on January 1, 2017, women became a majority on the five-member court for the first time in the state's history. Walker was previously the associate general counsel for the West Virginia United Health System and worked in private practice for over 20 years on labor and employment matters before her election to the court. Walker was the only justice acquitted by the state Senate in the 2018 impeachment of the entire court by the House of Delegates, following a spending scandal that saw three justices resign from the court – two of whom later plead guilty or were convicted of federal charges of wire fraud, mail fraud, and witness tampering – with a fourth justice spared from a Senate trial after the Appeals Court, sitting as the Supreme Court, issued an injunction. Walker went on to serve as chief justice of the court in 2019 and 2023. Morrissey will appoint Walker's replacement on the court from a pool of between two and five candidates furnished by the Judicial Vacancy Advisory Commission no later than July 18, 2025. The governor will make an appointment no later than August 17, 2025. The new justice may serve on the court until at least December 31, 2028, and must stand for retention election in May of 2028 to remain on the court.

## Kansas Supreme Court

Kansas Supreme Court Justice Evelyn Wilson announced she will resign from the court on July 4, 2025, after she was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease. Wilson was appointed to the state's highest court in 2019 by Gov. Laura Kelly (D). She was previously a district court judge and worked in private practice for nearly two decades before becoming a judge. Kelly will appoint Wilson's replacement from a list of three finalists chosen by the state's Supreme Court Nominating Commission. The nominating commission is currently accepting applicants to fill the vacancy that will be left by Wilson's retirement. The eventual appointee must run for retention election in 2026 to remain on the court.

## Vermont Supreme Court

Vermont Supreme Court Associate Justice Karen Carroll announced she will retire from the court in August of 2025. Carroll was appointed to the court in 2017 by Gov. Phil Scott (R) and retained by voters in 2023. She was previously a judge of the Vermont Superior Court and worked as an assistant state attorney general, a Special Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Vermont, and a deputy county prosecutor before joining the bench. Her impending retirement will give Scott his fourth appointment to the five-member court. Scott will appoint Carroll's replacement from a pool of candidates vetted by the state's judicial nominating board, and the finalist must be confirmed by the state senate. The new justice may remain on the court until 2029, when they will be required to stand for retention election alongside the other four members of the court.

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## New Hampshire Supreme Court

New Hampshire Supreme Court Justice James Bassett announced he would retire on August 31, 2025, approximately one year before he reaches the state's mandatory retirement age of 70 in September of 2026. Bassett first joined the court in 2012 after being appointed by then Gov. John Lynch (D). He worked in private practice for nearly 30 years before his appointment to the state's highest court, specializing in civil and commercial litigation, land use, and First Amendment issues. He is the court's longest-serving justice and the only justice currently serving on the court who was not appointed by former Gov. John Sununu (R). Gov. Kelly Ayotte (R) will appoint Bassett's replacement and the state's Executive Council will be required to approve the nominee. Four Republicans and one Democrat currently serve on the Executive Council. Bassett's eventual replacement will be Ayotte's first appointment to the state's high court.

## Texas Supreme Court

Texas Supreme Court Justice Jeff Boyd announced he will retire from the court this summer before his term officially ends in 2026. Gov. Greg Abbott (R) will appoint Boyd's successor. Abbott appointed six of the nine justices on the state supreme court, giving him another opportunity to reshape Texas' highest court. Boyd first joined the court in 2012 after an appointment by Gov. Rick Perry (R) and subsequently won re-election to the court. Abbott's pick will undoubtedly be another conservative jurist. At a Federalist Society event, Abbott stated that he looks for certain principles like originalism and strict constructionism in his judicial appointees. Abbott's eventual pick for the court will need to stand for election for the full term in the next general election.

## Hawaii Supreme Court

Hawaii Supreme Court Chief Justice Mark Recktenwald will be required to retire before reaching the state's mandatory retirement age of 70 on October 8, 2025. The state's judicial nominating commission is currently seeking applicants to fill the vacancy that will be created by his retirement. The commission will interview applicants and forward finalists to Gov. Josh Green (D). Green will choose a finalist, who must be confirmed to the ten-year term by the state senate.



# 2026 ELECTIONS AND VACANCIES

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## ELECTIONS

As of early 2025, 30 states will hold state supreme court elections in 2026. Fourteen seats will be on ballots in five states holding partisan elections, 23 seats will be on ballots in 12 states holding nonpartisan elections, and 23 seats will be on ballots in 13 states holding retention elections, totaling 60 seats in question. Nineteen of the 60 seats are held by justices who were nominated or supported by Democrats, with the remaining 41 seats being held by justices nominated or supported by Republicans. These numbers could change due to unanticipated resignations, vacancies, or appointments.

RETENTION ELECTIONS		NONPARTISAN ELECTIONS		PARTISAN ELECTIONS	
State	Seats	State	Seats	State	Seats
<b>Alaska</b>	1	<b>Arkansas</b>	2	<b>Alabama</b>	2
Jude Pate (R)		Open Seat		Greg Shaw (R)	
<b>Arizona</b>	2	Open Seat		Brady Mendheim Jr. (R)	
John Lopez IV (R)		<b>Georgia</b>	3	<b>Louisiana</b>	1
Maria Elena Cruz (D)		Sarah Hawkins Warren (R)		Jay McCallum (R)	
<b>California</b>	2	Charlie Bethel (R)		Cade Cole (R)	
Joshua Groban (D)		Michael Boggs Replacement (R)		<b>North Carolina</b>	1
Kelli Evans (D)		<b>Idaho</b>	2	Anita Earls (D)	
<b>Colorado</b>	1	Gregory Moeller (R)		<b>Ohio</b>	2
William Hood III (D)		Cynthia Meyer (R)		Jennifer Brunner (D)	
<b>Florida</b>	1	<b>Kentucky</b>	1	Daniel Hawkins (R)	
Carlos Muñiz (R)		Debra Lambert (R)		<b>Texas</b>	7
<b>Kansas</b>	2	<b>Michigan</b>	2	Jimmy Blacklock (CJ) (SC) (R)	
Eric Rosen (D)		Noah Hood (D)		Jeffrey Boyd Replacement (SC) (R)	
Evelyn Wilson Replacement (D)		Megan Cavanagh (CJ)(D)		Brett Busby (SC) (R)	
<b>Maryland</b>	1	<b>Minnesota</b>	3	James Sullivan (SC) (R)	
Peter Killough (D)		Paul Thissen (D)		Bert Richardson (CCA) (R)	
<b>Nebraska</b>	1	Sarah Hennesy (D)		Kevin Yeary (CCA) (R)	
Jeffrey Funke (CJ) (R)		Theodora Gaïtas (D)		David Newell (CCA) (R)	
<b>Oklahoma</b>	5	<b>Montana</b>	1		
John Kane IV (SC) (R)		Open Seat			
Richard Darby (SC) (R)		<b>Nevada</b>	2		
Travis Jett (SC) (R)		Douglas Herndon (CJ) (R)			
Gary Lumpkin (CCA) (R)		Kristina Pickering (R)			
Robert Hudson (CCA) (R)		<b>North Dakota</b>	2		
<b>South Dakota</b>	1	Jerod Tufte (R)			
Janine Kern (R)		Douglas Bahr (R)			
<b>Tennessee</b>	1	<b>Oregon</b>	1		
Mary Wagner (R)		Christopher Garrett (D)			
<b>Utah</b>	2	<b>Washington</b>	3		
Diana Hagen (R)		Debra Stephens (CJ) (D)			
Jill Pohlman (R)		Charles Johnson (D)			
<b>Wyoming</b>	1	Raquel Montoya-Lewis (D)			
Robert Jarosh (R)		<b>Wisconsin</b>	1		
Bridget Hill (R)		Rebecca Bradley (R)			
<b>Total:</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>14</b>

(CJ) = Chief Justice  
(SC) = Supreme Court  
(CCA) = Court of Criminal Appeals

(R) = Republican  
(D) = Democrat

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## VACANCIES

As of early 2025, vacancies are expected on two state supreme courts in 2026. These numbers could change due to unanticipated resignations, vacancies, or appointments.

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### Virginia

The Virginia General Assembly confirmed Virginia Court of Appeals Judge Junius P. Fulton III to become the next associate justice of the Virginia Supreme Court when Chief Justice S. Bernard Goodwyn retires from the court on January 1, 2026. Fulton has served on the Court of Appeals since its expansion in 2021. He had previously served as a judge of the Norfolk Circuit Court since 1996, where he helped to create a drug court that he also presided over for more than 20 years. Justices of the Virginia Supreme Court are elected to a 12-year term on the court by majority vote of both chambers of the General Assembly. The seven members of the court will select the court's next chief justice.

### New Hampshire

Associate Justice Anna Barbara Hantz Marconi must leave New Hampshire Supreme Court by February 12, 2026, when she will reach the state's mandatory retirement age of 70. Marconi was first appointed to the court in 2017 by former New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu (R) and confirmed unanimously by the State Executive Council. Prior to joining the state's highest court, she was a civil litigator and former member of the Judicial Selection Commission of New Hampshire. As discussed earlier in this report, Marconi may be required to leave the court before reaching her 70th birthday in 2026 due to ongoing criminal and ethics matters. New Hampshire's current governor, Kelly Ayotte (R), will choose Marconi's successor. Her nominee must be confirmed by the State Executive Council, which is elected by the public every two years.

# CONCLUSION

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There is increasingly crucial work to do to ensure that our state courts meaningfully reflect the communities they serve and uphold our most fundamental rights. With state supreme court elections this year in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, dozens of state supreme court elections in 2026, important vacancies to be filled via appointments on state supreme courts throughout the country, and critical cases coming before each of these courts, it is more urgent than ever that people in every state understand who sits on their courts and how they get there. AFJ Action remains committed to educating advocates, stakeholders, and voters about the importance of state courts and the need for exceptionally qualified, demographically and professionally diverse state courts. We will partner closely with communities throughout the country to achieve this goal. The future of our democracy and our fundamental human rights depend on it.



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